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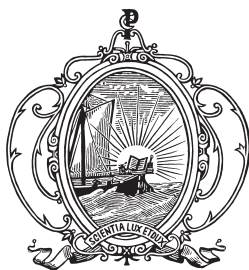
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The Fourth-Century Debates



PEETERS

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Table of Contents

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

Jana PLÁTOVÁ, Centre for Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Texts, Olomouc, Czech Republic Die Fragmente des Clemens Alexandrinus in den griechischen und arabischen Katenen.....	3
Marco RIZZI, Milan, Italy The Work of Clement of Alexandria in the Light of his Contemporary Philosophical Teaching.....	11
Stuart Rowley THOMSON, Oxford, UK Apostolic Authority: Reading and Writing Legitimacy in Clement of Alexandria	19
Davide DAINESI, Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose ‘Giovanni XXIII’, Bologna, Italy Clement of Alexandria’s Refusal of Valentinian ἀπόρροια	33
Dan BATOVICI, St Andrews, UK Hermas in Clement of Alexandria	41
Piotr ASHWIN-SIEJKOWSKI, Chichester, UK Clement of Alexandria on the Creation of Eve: Exegesis in the Service of a Pedagogical Project.....	53
Pamela MULLINS REAVES, Durham, NC, USA Multiple Martyrdoms and Christian Identity in Clement of Alexandria’s <i>Stromateis</i>	61
Michael J. THATE, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT, USA Identity Construction as Resistance: Figuring Hegemony, Biopolitics, and Martyrdom as an Approach to Clement of Alexandria.....	69
Veronika ČERNUŠKOVÁ, Olomouc, Czech Republic The Concept of εὐπάθεια in Clement of Alexandria	87
Kamala PAREL-NUTTALL, Calgary, Canada Clement of Alexandria’s Ideal Christian Wife	99

THE FOURTH-CENTURY DEBATES

Michael B. SIMMONS, Montgomery, Alabama, USA Universalism in Eusebius of Caesarea: The Soteriological Use of سبحه الله ولا نعبد الا الله وحده in Book III of the <i>Theophany</i>	125
Jon M. ROBERTSON, Portland, Oregon, USA 'The Beloved of God': The Christological Backdrop for the Political Theory of Eusebius of Caesarea in <i>Laus Constantini</i>	135
Cordula BANDT, Berlin, Germany Some Remarks on the Tone of Eusebius' <i>Commentary on Psalms</i> ...	143
Clayton COOMBS, Melbourne, Australia Literary Device or Legitimate Diversity: Assessing Eusebius' Use of the Optative Mood in <i>Quaestiones ad Marinum</i>	151
David J. DEVORE, Berkeley, California, USA Eusebius' Un-Josephan History: Two Portraits of Philo of Alexandria and the Sources of Ecclesiastical Historiography.....	161
Gregory Allen ROBBINS, Denver, USA 'Number Determinate is Kept Concealed' (Dante, <i>Paradiso</i> XXIX 135): Eusebius and the Transformation of the List (<i>Hist. eccl.</i> III 25)	181
James CORKE-WEBSTER, Manchester, UK A Literary Historian: Eusebius of Caesarea and the Martyrs of Lyons and Palestine.....	191
Samuel FERNÁNDEZ, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile ¿Crisis arriana o crisis monarquiana en el siglo IV? Las críticas de Marcelo de Ancira a Asterio de Capadocia.....	203
Laurence VIANÈS, Université de Grenoble / HiSoMA «Sources Chrétien- nes», France L'interprétation des prophètes par Apollinaire de Laodicée a-t-elle influencé Théodore de Mopsueste?	209
Hélène GRELIER-DENEUX, Paris, France La réception d'Apollinaire dans les controverses christologiques du V ^e siècle à partir de deux témoins, Cyrille d'Alexandrie et Théodoret de Cyr	223

Sophie H. CARTWRIGHT, Edinburgh, UK So-called Platonism, the Soul, and the Humanity of Christ in Eus- tathius of Antioch's <i>Contra Ariomanitas et de anima</i>	237
Donna R. HAWK-REINHARD, St Louis, USA Cyril of Jerusalem's Sacramental <i>Theōsis</i>	247
Georgij ZAKHAROV, Moscou, Russie Théologie de l'image chez Germinius de Sirmium.....	257
Michael Stuart WILLIAMS, Maynooth, Ireland Auxentius of Milan: From Orthodoxy to Heresy	263
Jarred A. MERCER, Oxford, UK The Life in the Word and the Light of Humanity: The Exegetical Foundation of Hilary of Poitiers' Doctrine of Divine Infinity	273
Janet SIDAWAY, Edinburgh, UK Hilary of Poitiers and Phoebadius of Agen: Who Influenced Whom?	283
Dominique GONNET, S.J., Lyon, France The Use of the Bible within Athanasius of Alexandria's <i>Letters to Serapion</i>	291
William G. RUSCH, New York, USA Corresponding with Emperor Jovian: The Strategy and Theology of Apollinaris of Laodicea and Athanasius of Alexandria.....	301
Rocco SCHEMBRA, Catania, Italia Il percorso editoriale del <i>De non parcendo in deum delinquentibus</i> di Lucifero di Cagliari	309
Caroline MACÉ, Leuven, Belgium, and Ilse DE VOS, Oxford, UK Pseudo-Athanasius, <i>Quaestio ad Antiochum</i> 136 and the <i>Theosophia</i>	319

A Literary Historian: Eusebius of Caesarea and the Martyrs of Lyons and Palestine¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to re-ignite discussion about two sets of martyr stories in early Christian literature, one perhaps overly treasured, the other somewhat neglected. It identifies a number of striking similarities between *The Letter of the Churches in Lyons and Vienne to the Church in Smyrna*, preserved in Book V of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, and *The Martyrs of Palestine*, written by Eusebius himself. I will demonstrate not just the presence of these literary echoes, but also the strong likelihood that Eusebius himself was aware of them and may be responsible for them. Given the difficulties of dating surrounding both texts, and therefore the impossibility of definitively assigning the direction of dependency, this paper suggests first that both sources should be used with caution for historical reconstruction. Second, and more interesting, it asks what these similarities reveal about Eusebius' own attitude to early Christian martyrdom. I suggest that the parallels in his writings between the descriptions of these martyrs, ostensibly killed one hundred and thirty years apart on opposite sides of the Mediterranean, reveals that Eusebius' interest is in the continuity of the Christian community's behaviour in the face of 'persecution'. The similarities between the two sets of stories can tentatively be ascribed to Eusebius' desire that the Christian community appear homogenous throughout its history.

I. Early Christian martyrdoms in Lyons and Caesarea

I begin by noting an eye-catching similarity between the treatment of two martyred Christians by the Roman authorities, one in *The Letter of the Churches in Lyons and Vienne to the Church in Smyrna* (hereafter referred to as *The Martyrs of Lyons*) and one in *The Martyrs of Palestine*. In 177 AD, a man from Pergamum called Attalus was martyred in the western town of Lyons.² His final

¹ I am hugely grateful to the audience at the Oxford Patristics Conference, August 2011, especially Mark Edwards, Aaron Johnson, Winrich Löhr and Candida Moss, for their questions and comments, to David DeVore and Riccardo Bof, who read this paper and made many helpful suggestions, and especially to Kate Cooper, who enabled, encouraged and inspired my doctoral project, of which this article is an offshoot.

² The date of events is unclear; see e.g. Timothy Barnes, 'Eusebius and the Date of the Martyrdoms', in Robert Turcan and Jean Rouge (eds), *Les Martyrs de Lyon (177) / Colloque international du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Lyon, 20-23 septembre 1977* (Paris, 1978), 137-41.

moments are recorded in *The Martyrs of Lyons*, a document cherished by generations of scholars as supposedly the earliest record of Christianity in the west. The letter is anonymous, apparently sent from these western Christian communities to the eastern one in the aftermath of the events described. It reports that Attalus was a stalwart of the Christian community in Pergamum (*EH* V 1.17) but well-known also in Lyons (*EH* V 1.43). We are told that a crowd gathered in the arena called for him to be brought before them.³ Attalus is duly produced, described in the letter as ‘a ready combatant by reason of his good conscience’ (ἔτοιμος ... ἀγωνιστῆς διὰ τὸ εὖ συνείδητον), ‘truly exercised in the Christian discipline’ (γνησίως ἐν τῇ Χριστιανῇ συντάξει γεγυμνασμένος), and ‘always a witness among us of truth’ (ἀεὶ μάρτυς ἐγγεγόνει παρ’ ἡμῖν ἀληθείας, *EH* V 1.43).⁴ The letter tells how ‘he was conducted round the amphitheatre, preceded by a board, on which was written in Latin “This is Attalus the Christian”’ (καὶ περιαχθεὶς κύκλῳ τοῦ ἀμφιθεάτρου, πίνακος αὐτὸν προάγοντος ἐν ᾧ ἐγγράπτο ‘Ρωμαῖστί· οὗτός ἐστιν Ἀτταλος ὁ Χριστιανός, *EH* V 1.44). Though reprieved on this occasion, Attalus is tortured and thrown to the beasts in the arena later in the account (*EH* V 1.53).

Exactly one hundred and thirty years later, one thousand eight hundred miles away in Caesarea in Palestine, an unrelated Christian, Agapius of Gaza, also died at the hands of the Romans, according to another Christian document, Eusebius of Caesarea’s *The Martyrs of Palestine*. This account of the effects of Diocletian’s ‘Great Persecution’ in the author’s homeland records how Agapius was thrown to wild animals in the arena at Caesarea in celebration of the emperor Maximin’s birthday. Agapius is described as ‘a man distinguished for sobriety and forbearance of conduct’ (*MPal* LR 6.3).⁵ We are told that he too was paraded around the arena preceded by a sign. His guards ‘brought him round in mockery in the midst of the arena; and a tablet with an inscription went before him, which bore no token of reproach save that he was a Christian’ (*MPal* LR 6.4). These references to the identifying signs may well be echoes

³ There is some debate over whether the martyrs in the arena were sacrificial victims or not. See e.g. James H. Oliver and Robert E.A. Palmer, ‘Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate’, *Hesperia* 24 (1955), 320-49; Timothy Barnes, ‘Legislation against Christians’, *JRS* 58 (1968), 44; *id.*, ‘Pre-Decian Acta Martyrum’, *JTS* n.s. 19 (1968), 518-9; Walter O. Moeller, ‘The Trinci/Trinqui and the Martyrs of Lyons’, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 2 (1972), 127.

⁴ Translations taken from: Hugh Lawlor and John Oulton, *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine*, vol. 1 (New York and Toronto, 1927); Greek text taken from: Gustave Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée. Histoire ecclésiastique*, 3 vols., SC 31, 41, 55 (Paris, 1952-1958; [vol. 3 repr. 1967]); <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/>.

⁵ No Greek text for this passage is extant. The long recension of *The Martyrs of Palestine*, from which this is taken, survives only in fragmentary form in the original Greek, but in full in a Syriac translation from which this story is taken. The short recension of the text, which does survive in full in the original Greek, does not contain this detail, a point I suggest is of significance and which I will discuss lower down in the main text.

of the sign identifying Jesus as the ‘King of the Jews’ in the gospels;⁶ *imitatio Christi* was a common motif in early Christian martyr literature.⁷ Significantly though, no early Christian martyrs are ever said to be labelled with a sign other than Attalus, Agapius and Jesus himself. The parallel is therefore striking, especially given the close similarity of the wording on the signs in Gaul and Caesarea.⁸ This prompts us to look more closely at these two texts.

A closer reading reveals other tantalising similarities. One of Attalus’ companions, a deacon of the church in Vienne called Sanctus (*EH* V 1.17), when questioned by the Roman governor in Lyons, refuses to answer all questions asked of him. Again, this is reminiscent of Christ’s behaviour in the gospel narratives. But the question and its reply are stylised, and demand comparison with the story of Apphianus, a young man from Lycia tortured and killed by the Roman governor Urbanus in *The Martyrs of Palestine*. In *The Martyrs of Lyons*, Sanctus when questioned, ‘would not state even his own name, or the people or city whence he came, or whether he were bond or free. But to every question he replied in Latin: “I am a Christian”’ (μήτε τὸ ἴδιον κατεπιπεῖν ὄνομα μήτε ἔθνους μήτε πόλεως ὅθεν ἦν, μήτε εἰ δοῦλος ἢ ἐλεύθερος εἶη· ἀλλὰ πρὸς πάντα τὰ ἐπερωτώμενα ἀπεκρίνατο τῇ Ῥωμαϊκῇ φωνῇ «Χριστιανός εἰμι», *EH* V 1.20). In *The Martyrs of Palestine*, Apphianus too ‘made no further confession than that he was a Christian; and when he next asked who he was, whence he came, and where he was staying, he confessed nothing, except that he was a slave of Christ’ (<οὐδὲν> πλεῖον ἢ Χριστιανὸν ἑαυτὸν ὁμολόγει εἶναι, εἶτα ἐρωτώμενος ὅστις εἶη καὶ πόθεν, ποῖ τε εἶη μένων, οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ Χριστοῦ δοῦλον ἑαυτὸν ὁμολόγει, *MPal* LR 4.12). Though not identical, nevertheless the series of questions concerning identity and provenance, as well as the echoed language of slavery in these two texts describing events many miles and years apart, are eerily similar.

The double manner in which the refusal is recorded is also paralleled. In the account of Sanctus’ suffering in Lyons, the author repeats his point: ‘This he confessed again and again, instead of name and city and race and all else, and

⁶ See *Mark* 15:26; *Matth.* 27:37; *Luke* 23:38; *John* 19:20.

⁷ *The Martyrs of Palestine* comments explicitly on the similarity of Agapius’ death to that of Jesus, noting that he was also killed alongside a common criminal, and that ‘very similar was this passion to the Passion of our Saviour...’ (*MPal* LR 6.5). See Candida Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford and New York, 2010), 47, 62, 68 and 85 on *imitatio Christi* in *The Martyrs of Lyons*; 62 and 71 on Eusebius’ use of it, though not mentioning the examples noted here. In her second book, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven and London, 2012), 105, Moss notes the echo of the phrase ‘worthy of undying remembrance’ between *The Martyrs of Lyons* (V 1.1), *The Martyrs of Palestine* (2.28), and *EH* III 5.4.

⁸ Paul L. Maier, ‘The Inscription on the Cross of Jesus of Nazareth’, *Hermes* 124 (1996), 59–61, notes that such signs were common Roman practice, and that there is no reason to doubt their historicity. He also notes, however, the paucity of literary references to them. I owe this reference to David DeVore.

no other word did the heathen hear from his lips' (τοῦτο καὶ ἀντὶ ὀνόματος καὶ ἀντὶ πόλεως καὶ ἀντὶ γένους καὶ ἀντὶ παντὸς ἐπαλλήλως ὁμολόγει, ἄλλην δὲ φωνὴν οὐκ ἤκουσαν αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔθνη). Similarly, the story about Apphianus asserts for a second time that when his torturers 'endeavoured to force him to say who he was, whence he came, and where he was staying' (λέγειν ἐξεβιάζοντο ὅστις εἶη καὶ πόθεν καὶ ποῦ εἶη μένων, *MPal* LR 4.13), he 'did not even count them worthy of a reply, except that to their questions he made use of but one utterance – a confession of Christ and a testimony that he knew His Father as God alone' (ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἀποκρίσεως αὐτοῦς καταξιῶν, πρὸς τὰς πεύσεις μιᾷ μόνῃ ἐκέχρητο φωνῇ τὸν Χριστὸν ὁμολογούσῃ καὶ τὸν τούτου πατέρα μόνον εἰδέναι μαρτυρούσῃ θεόν). The twin assertion of the refusal in both texts is striking.

In the respective responses of the Roman governors there is a further parallel between the two stories. In Lyons, the governor and his lackeys respond to Sanctus' refusal to answer their questions with further tortures, eventually applying 'red-hot brazen plates to the most tender parts of his body' (χαλκᾶς λεπίδας διὰ πύρους προσεκόλλων τοῖς τρυφερωτάτοις μέλεσι τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, *EH* V 1.21). In Apphianus' case, the governor's rage is so great that he too resorts to fire; he orders his men to 'swathe his feet in linen cloths soaked in oil and set them on fire' (λίνοις ἐλαίῳ δευθεῖσιν τοὺς πόδας περιπλέξαντας αὐτοῦ πῦρ ὑφάσαι, *MPal* LR 4.12). In both cases the refusal sparks more torture, and in both cases the authorities turn to fire in their desperation.

One further parallel is worth noting, in the effects of these tortures upon the victims. Sanctus is so deformed by his injuries that his body is described as 'one whole wound and bruise, contracted, having lost the outward form of a man...' (ὅλον τραῦμα καὶ μώλωψ καὶ συνεσπασμένον καὶ ἀποβεβληκὸς τὴν ἀνθρώπειον ἔξωθεν μορφήν, *EH* V 1.23). Apphianus too had earlier been whipped so badly that 'his face was disfigured and it was no longer possible <even for his friends> to recognise who he was' (ὡς μηκέθ', ὅστις εἶη, τὸ πρόσωπον ἀφανισθέντα, γινώσκεισθαι, *MPal* LR 4.11). After his fiery tortures he is described as follows: 'His sides so rent, his whole body so swollen, and the fashion of his face altered' (οὕτω μὲν τὰς πλευρὰς διερρωγώς, οὕτω δὲ διωγκηκώς καὶ τοῦ προσώπου τὴν μορφήν ἡλλοιωμένος, *MPal* LR 4.12). The experiences of Sanctus and Apphianus closely resemble each other: the terms in which they refuse to cooperate, their fiery torments, and the eventual result where they are so battered as to be unrecognisable. The linguistic parallels are occasional, but the structural and thematic parallels are pronounced.

Numerous other parallels and echoes are revealed when these two texts are read together, though the size of this paper prevents detailed analysis of them all. Two other points are worth mentioning. Both narratives describe extremely angry and violent reactions from the Roman authorities. This is not a common feature of early Christian martyr *acta*, but in both these texts the representatives

of Roman authority are described as angry, even bestial, and as caring nothing for the age or situation of their victims.⁹ Similarly there is an emphasis in both texts on the mutual encouragement of the martyrs, both among themselves and with their wider communities.¹⁰ Both texts are frequently punctuated by comments on this quality, and I will return to this point. All these similarities taken together encourage us to examine the transmission of these two texts more closely.

II. Coincidence or design?

It is of course possible that these surprising similarities are simply coincidences of historical circumstance. But a number of factors might make us hesitate to so dismiss them. The first is the transmission of the two accounts. *The Martyrs of Lyons* is anonymous and undated, and is transmitted only in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History*, who was also the author of the other text under discussion here, *The Martyrs of Palestine*. Eusebius, the self-proclaimed first church historian, writing both the *Ecclesiastical History* and *The Martyrs of Palestine* in the early 4th century, connects these two accounts otherwise separated by a gulf in time and space. Indeed, as we shall see, at one point a version of *The Martyrs of Lyons* formed part of the *Ecclesiastical History*. This Eusebian link demands that we pay heed to what might otherwise seem coincidental.

Close inspection of the editions of and relationships between the two texts suggests strongly that these similarities are not coincidental. *The Martyrs of Palestine* is extant in two recensions, a longer and shorter (the longer survives in Greek only in fragments, in some fragments of a later Latin translation and in a complete Syriac translation; the shorter is extant in the original Greek).¹¹

⁹ See e.g. *EH* V 1.10; V 1.29-31; V 1.50; V 1.53-4; V 1.57-8; *MPal* LR 4.10-2; 7.1-2; 11.16; 11.24. See further on this point, Jill Harries 'Constructing the Judge: Judicial accountability and the culture of criticism in late antiquity', in Richard Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identity in Late Antiquity* (London and New York, 1999), 214-33, and James Corke-Webster, 'Author and Authority: Literary Representations of Moral Authority in Eusebius of Caesarea's *The Martyrs of Palestine*', in Peter Gemeinhardt and Johan Leemans (eds), *Martyrdom in Late Antiquity (300-400 AD): History and Discourse, Tradition and Religious Identity* (Berlin and New York, 2012), 51-78.

¹⁰ See e.g. *EH* V 1.6; V 1.28; V 1.41; V 1.42; V 1.46; V 1.49; V 1.54; V 2.6-7; *MPal* 3.4, 7.1, 8.5-8, 8.9-10, 9.4-5, 10.1, 11.2, 11.22, 11.25-6, 11.29. See again J. Corke-Webster, 'Author and Authority' (2012).

¹¹ For details see H. Lawlor and J. Oulton, *Eusebius*, vol. 2, 46-50. The Greek fragments were discovered and published in Hippolyte Delehaye, 'Eusebii Caesariensis *De Martyribus Palaestinae Longioris Libelli Fragmenta*', *AnBoll* 16 (1897), 113-39; the Syriac version, partially available in Stephen Assemani, *Acta Sanctorum martyrum orientalium et occidentalium* (Rome, 1748) was published in full in William Cureton, *History of the Martyrs in Palestine, by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, Discovered in a Very Antient (sic) Manuscript* (London and Edinburgh, 1861).

The shorter contains largely the same anecdotes as the longer but in less detail.¹² There has been extensive debate over the sequence and dating of the two recensions, connected to the debates over the editions and dating of the *Ecclesiastical History*. Most scholars now follow the conclusions of Richard Burgess' seminal 1997 article.¹³ On this theory, the long recension was completed almost immediately the persecution in Palestine ceased (temporarily) in April 311 following the Edict of Toleration. Eusebius then abbreviated it to produce a short recension (numerous textual issues indicate that the short recension was an abridgement of the long) which formed part of the first edition of the *Ecclesiastical History*, produced in 313/314. When Eusebius issued a second edition of the *Ecclesiastical History* in 315/316 he replaced the short recension with the current Book VIII.¹⁴ At this point the long recension was lightly edited and issued in a second edition.¹⁵

It is striking that the literary similarities detailed above between the Lyons and Caesarean martyrs are found only in the long recension, not in the short. In the case of Agapius, though many details are identical between the two recensions, the inscribed tablet identifying him as a Christian has disappeared in the short. With Apphianus too, in the short recension there is no trace of the repeated threefold questioning or the refusal to respond with anything other than a declaration of Christianity.¹⁶ Given that the short recension was almost certainly written after the long, this absence is hardly coincidental. It seems that

¹² The short recension is included in most but not all of the extant manuscripts of the *Ecclesiastical History*. In some it is found at the close of Book X, in one in the middle of Book VIII starting at chapter 13, and in the majority between Books VIII and IX. However, it is not included in the Syriac or Rufinus' translations of the *Ecclesiastical History*.

¹³ Richard Burgess, 'The Dates and Editions of Eusebius' *Chronici Canones* and *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *JTS* n.s. 48 (1997), 502. The literature on this topic is extensive; other key contributions include: H. Lawlor and J. Oulton, *Eusebius*, vol. 2, 1-11; Timothy Barnes, 'The Editions of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*', *GRBS* 21 (1980), 191-201; *id.*, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1981), 148-50, 154-8; *id.*, 'Some Inconsistencies in Eusebius', *JTS* n.s. 35 (1984), 470-5; Andrew Louth, 'The Date of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *JTS* n.s. 41 (1990), 111-23. See also the excellent timeline, which follows Burgess' suggestions, in Andrew J. Carriker, *The Library of Eusebius of Caesarea* (Leiden and Boston, 2003), 37-41.

¹⁴ That the short recension was once where Book VIII stands now was a suggestion popularised by Timothy Barnes; see *id.*, 'Some Inconsistencies' (1984), 470-1; building on Joseph Lightfoot, 'Eusebius of Caesarea', in William Smith and Henry Wace (eds), *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, vol. 2 (London, 1880), 319-21, and H. Lawlor and J. Oulton, *Eusebius II* (1927), 7-9.

¹⁵ The only significant problem with this theory is a passing phrase in the 315/316 second edition of the *Ecclesiastical History*, where Eusebius indicates that he intends to produce his account of the Caesarean martyrs in the future (*EH* VIII 13.7). Burgess solves this by suggesting that Eusebius failed to publish the initial long recension before the persecution in Palestine began again in November 311, and when persecution finally ceased in summer 313 (following the Edict of Milan), he had already decided to incorporate a shorter version into the *Ecclesiastical History*. The long recension was thus only needed again after the short recension had been replaced by the current Book VIII in 315/316, hence its eventual publication at this point.

¹⁶ The comment on Apphianus' battered state is present in the short recension.

when producing the short recension, originally intended to stand as Book VIII of the *Ecclesiastical History*, and thus to be read together with the account of the martyrs in Lyons in Book V, Eusebius removed from *The Martyrs of Palestine* those elements that echoed that earlier story, since he had produced the *Ecclesiastical History* after writing the long recension of *The Martyrs of Palestine*. Eusebius' awareness of these literary parallels and his apparent attempt to hide them from the reader who would have both stories in front of him (remembering that the long recension was probably originally intended as a standalone work) indicates that these parallels are more than coincidences. We are prompted to look more closely at the writer linking these two texts, Eusebius of Caesarea.

III. Eusebius: A literary historian?

It is worth pausing here and looking briefly at the state of scholarship on Eusebius' craft as a writer. Modern scholars have typically offered a low valuation of Eusebius' literary sophistication.¹⁷ Foakes-Jackson's judgement is typical: 'Though here and there he indulges in rather turgid rhetoric he has no eye, either for historic effect, or for picturesque description.'¹⁸ There have however been occasional voices advising against a simplistic reading of Eusebius and even urging a greater appreciation of his narrative abilities. Eduard Schwartz, for example, thought that Eusebius' picture of Origen in Book VI was warped by strong apologetic concerns.¹⁹ Recent scholars of ancient biography in particular have affirmed this judgement. Simon Swain, at the start of his and Mark Edwards' collection of essays on ancient biography, notes that 'Eusebius' portrait of Origen ... is not *about* Origen, but uses him to present to us the history and doctrine of the Church through the times he lived in and the events he experienced (as these are seen by Eusebius in his time)'.²⁰

Doron Mendels' 1999 study *The Media Revolution of Christianity*, though its conclusions can be questioned, highlighted the care Eusebius took in constructing

¹⁷ This perhaps stems from Photius' dismissal of Eusebius in the ninth century: 'His style is neither agreeable nor brilliant, but he was a man of great learning' (Photius, *Bibliotheca* 13, trans. from René Henry, *Photius. Bibliothèque* [Paris, 1959], 11).

¹⁸ Frederick Foakes-Jackson, *Eusebius Pamphili* (Cambridge, 1933), 73.

¹⁹ Eduard Schwartz, *Eusebius: Die Kirchengeschichte*, GCS 9, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1909).

²⁰ Simon Swain, 'Biography and Biographic in the Literature of the Roman Empire', in Mark Edwards and Simon Swain (eds), *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1997), 18. See also Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1983) for an excellent account of Eusebius' discussion of biographical writing in the *Against Hierocles*, and demonstration of how Eusebius puts his own principles to work in the early sections of Book VI of the *Ecclesiastical History*.

his narrative and his awareness of his audience.²¹ Erica Carotenuto went further in demonstrating how Eusebius fabricated a story about five Egyptians in chapter 11 of *The Martyrs of Palestine* using material and motifs taken from elsewhere (both from his own writings and those of his intellectual forebear Origen).²² Joseph Verheyden does not go quite so far in his own survey article on *The Martyrs of Palestine*, but still highlights the rhetorical aspects of that text.²³ Recently, Marie Verdoner's *Narrated Reality: The Historia ecclesiastica of Eusebius of Caesarea* has applied the principles of narratology to Eusebius' writing to afford it attention as text, rather than simply as a more or less reliable historical document. She reads with a particular 'sensitivity towards the unsaid, the implicit, or even the repressed'.²⁴ Eusebius' stories about Origen in Book 6 have been a particularly fruitful site in breeding an appreciation of Eusebius' literary skills. Christoph Marksches was recently prompted to suggest that 'in Zukunft noch viel genauer auf die literarischen und rhetorischen Formen der Präsentation dieses Materials geachtet werden muss'.²⁵ Modern scholars have thus shown a growing appreciation of Eusebius' considerable skill in composition, and of his willingness to compose or edit material in order to make a particular point for his audience.²⁶

²¹ Doron Mendels, *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity: An Essay on Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK, 1999). Mendels' own view is that Eusebius manipulates his material in the pursuit of greater publicity and interest for a sympathetic pagan audience. There are a number of reasons for questioning this suggestion, but these are not pertinent to the present discussion.

²² Erica Carotenuto, 'Five Egyptians Coming from Jerusalem; Some Remarks on Eusebius, "De martyribus palestinae" 11.6-13', *The Classical Quarterly* 52 (2002), 500-6.

²³ Joseph Verheyden, 'Pain and Glory: Some Introductory Comments on the Rhetorical Qualities and Potential of the *Martyrs of Palestine* by Eusebius of Caesarea', in Johan Leemans (ed.), *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 241 (Leuven, 2010), 353-91.

²⁴ Marie Verdoner, *Narrated Reality: The Historia ecclesiastica of Eusebius of Caesarea*, Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity IX (Frankfurt am Main a.o., 2011), 22. See also Elizabeth Penland, 'Eusebius Philosophicus?', in Sabrina Inowlocki and Claudio Zamagni (eds), *Reconsidering Eusebius* (Leiden, 2011), 87-98; Lorenzo Perrone, 'Eusèbe de Césarée face à l'essor de la littérature chrétienne', *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 11 (2007), 311-34; and J. Corke-Webster, 'Author and Authority' (2012).

²⁵ Ch. Marksches, 'Eusebius als Schriftsteller. Beobachtungen zum sechsten Buch der Kirchengeschichte', in Adele Monaci Castagno (ed.), *La biografia di origene fra storia e agiografia. Atti del VI Convegno di Studi del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina*. Biblioteca di Adamantius 1 (Villa Verucchio, 2004), 50'. See too the other essays in this volume. Other recent work on Eusebius' craft in the "Life of Origen" includes Thomas Ferguson, *The Past is Prologue: The Revolution of Nicene Historiography*, Vigiliae Christianae Supplements 75 (Leiden, 2005); Joseph Verheyden, 'Origen in the Making: Reading between (and behind) the Lines of Eusebius' "Life of Origen" (HE 6)', in Sylwia Kaczmarek and Henryk Pietras (eds), *Origeniana Decima: Origen as Writer* (Leuven, Paris and Walpole, MA, 2011), 713-25.

²⁶ This increasing appreciation of Eusebius' sophistication as a writer has gone hand in hand with a desire to discourage a narrow focus on only the *Ecclesiastical History* among Eusebius'

If we allow with these more recent studies that Eusebius is to be credited with significant narrative creativity, we must return to the literary parallels in the Lyons and Caesarean martyrdom stories with a fresh set of questions. It becomes reasonable to suppose that Eusebius has composed or edited one set of stories with the others in mind. Unfortunately, it is impossible to definitively ascribe dependency either way. The standard wisdom would suggest that Eusebius' own compositions in *The Martyrs of Palestine* have been influenced, consciously or sub-consciously, by his prior reading of the far earlier, and independently authored, *The Martyrs of Lyons*. Most scholars have accepted the authenticity of the latter document, as being authored in the west soon after the martyrdoms of 177, perhaps by Irenaeus, the future bishop of the Lyons community. It is also usually assumed that by the summer of 313, before the composition of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius had assembled his *Collection of Ancient Martyrdoms*, a group of martyr narratives from the first three centuries of Christianity to which Eusebius occasionally refers in his *Ecclesiastical History* (e.g. *EH* V 15.47; V pr. 2; V 4.3; V 21.4), and which is thought to have included the Lyons letter.²⁷ Most would accept then that the Lyons narrative gained its current form in the second century, and that Eusebius had read it before he came to write his own account of events in Palestine.

This likely dependency of *The Martyrs of Palestine* on *The Martyrs of Lyons* is not however entirely ironclad. Here is not the place for a detailed assessment of dating and origins, but one or two points are pertinent. Firstly, there are a number of difficulties with *The Martyrs of Lyons* as it stands. Though the second century dating of the Lyons account is generally accepted, problems remain. In 1912 the distinguished mediaeval scholar James Thompson proposed that the text was actually written roughly a century later.²⁸ Thompson was

extended corpus. Most important here are Michael Hollerich, *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah: Christian Exegesis in the Age of Constantine* (Oxford, 1999); Jörg Ulrich, *Euseb von Caesarea und die Juden. Studien zur Rolle der Juden in der Theologie des Eusebius von Caesarea*, PTS 49 (Berlin, 1999); Aryeh Kofsky, *Eusebius of Caesarea against Paganism. Jewish and Christian. Perspectives Series*, Vol. III (Leiden, Boston and Köln, 2000); Aaron Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argument in Eusebius' Praeparatio Evangelica* (Oxford, 2006); Sabrina Inowlocki, *Eusebius and the Jewish Authors: His Citation Technique in an Apologetic Context* (Leiden, 2006); S. Inowlocki and C. Zamagni, *Reconsidering Eusebius* (2011).

²⁷ See e.g. A. Carriker, *The Library of Eusebius* (2003), 38; Robert M. Grant, 'Eusebius and the Martyrs of Gaul', in R. Turcon and J. Rouge (eds), *Les Martyrs de Lyon (177)* (1978), 129-36.

²⁸ 'To sum up: The utter silence of all historians, whether pagan or Christian, as to the persecution of Lyons before Eusebius; the absence of any tradition of this nature before the Latin translation of Eusebius was known in the West; the extrinsic evidence against the probability of there having been any Christian community in Lyons before the middle of the third century; the flagrant violation of Roman law alleged of the governor in a century when the imperial administration was at its best; the singular anomalies and anachronisms of the process – if the persecution actually took place in the second century – the internal psychological evidence – all these point to a later and probably a third-century origin of the account', James W. Thompson, 'The Alleged Persecution of the Christians at Lyons in 177', *The American Journal of Theology* 16 (1913), 359-84, 379-80.

immediately criticised by two prominent scholars of the day, Adolf Harnack and Paul Allard.²⁹ Thompson responded, pointing out that these critiques failed to adequately answer all his questions.³⁰ Thompson remains a relatively lone voice, but the issue persists.³¹ Herbert Musurillo, for example, in his standard 1972 edition of the pre-Constantinian martyr *acta*, dismisses Thompson out of hand ('there is no solid reason for accepting the ingenious theory of J.W. Thompson'), but then independently accepts the viability of a thesis closely related to Thompson's ('However authentic the letter substantially is, this does not exclude the possibility of an editor who may have substantially reworked a primitive document some time in the third century').³² Winrich Löhr too discusses the possibility of an edited account. He is particularly troubled by a story concerning one Alcibiades, which is tacked on to the account of the martyrs in the *Ecclesiastical History*, ostensibly excerpted and quoted by Eusebius from elsewhere in the original letter. Löhr concludes that this anecdote, with its specifically anti-Montanist agenda, indicates to us that the letter as we read it in Eusebius has undergone significant editing.³³ For numerous reasons then the extant form of *The Martyrs of Lyons* is problematic.

In many ways, I suggest, Thompson's voice still rings out almost exactly a century on, concerned that 'the weight of Eusebius' mere authority and his great reputation for learning, backed by inert tradition, have for centuries borne down criticism and led to a too uncritical acceptance of him'.³⁴ It is noteworthy that Thompson placed foremost among the problems of the Lyons letter the bizarre and apparently illegal behaviour of the Roman governor.³⁵ Such irrational judicial behaviour from Roman officials is, as I noted above, entirely characteristic of Eusebius' own martyr narratives.³⁶ It is not inconceivable then

²⁹ Adolf Harnack, *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 3 (1913), 74-6 and Paul Allard, 'Une nouvelle théorie sur le martyre des chrétiens de Lyons, *Revue des questions historiques* (1913), 53-67.

³⁰ James W. Thompson, 'The Alleged Persecution of the Christians at Lyons in 177: A Reply to Certain Criticisms', *The American Journal of Theology* 17 (1913), 249-58; Allard did respond again in Paul Allard, 'Encore la lettre sur les martyrs Lyonnais de 177', *RQuestHist* 95 (1914), 83-9.

³¹ See the dismissal of Thompson in, for example, Paul Keresztes, 'The Massacre at Lugdunum in 177 A.D.', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 16 (1967), 75-86.

³² Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, 1972), xx-xxi.

³³ Winrich A. Löhr, 'Der Brief der Gemeinden von Lyon und Vienne', in Damaskinos Papan-dreou, Wolfgang A. Bienert and Knut Schäferdiek (eds), *Oecumenica et patristica: Festschrift für Wilhelm Schneemelcher zum 75. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart, 1989), 135-45. C.R. Moss, *The Other Christs* (2010), 189 and *Ancient Christian Martyrdom* (2012), 104-6, also allow for the possibility of third century or Eusebian editing.

³⁴ J.W. Thompson, 'A Reply to Certain Criticisms' (1913), 249-50.

³⁵ J.W. Thompson, 'A Reply to Certain Criticisms' (1913), 252. Even William Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church. A Study of Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford, 1965), 24-5 [n. 47] admits this point.

³⁶ See J. Corke-Webster, 'Author and Authority' (2012).

that the phenomena I identified in *The Martyrs of Lyons* actually stem from Eusebian editing.

Secondly, it is worth remembering that according to the standard dating of Burgess *et al.*, the long recension of *The Martyrs of Palestine* was written before the *Ecclesiastical History*, and potentially before *The Collection of Ancient Martyrdoms* was assembled. Eusebius produced his narrative history, which included the account of the martyrs in Lyons, after he had written the stories about Agapius, Apphianus and the other Palestinian martyrs. It is thus at least possible chronologically that Eusebius transmitted and edited *The Martyrs of Lyons* in the light of *The Martyrs of Palestine*, either when it was part of *The Collection of Ancient Martyrdoms* or the *Ecclesiastical History*.

The literary parallels observed in these two accounts above could thus find their original form in either text or in neither. Scholars should therefore be cautious of how they use these texts for historical purposes.³⁷ In previous scholarship both have been taken as largely accurate records, and used as the basis for reconstructed pictures of the early church and its 'persecution'.³⁸ But this article provides further evidence that Eusebius' compositional skills must be taken seriously, and that narratives written by him or preserved within his narrative works must be read with an eye for such literary motifs. This is certainly not to say either that Eusebius was a forger, or that his works cannot be used for historical purposes (our picture of early Christianity would be barren indeed without Eusebius' writings). It is rather to add more depth to our appreciation of this remarkable writer, and to advise against over-simplified historical reconstructions based on Eusebius which do not take into account the subtleties of his presentation. And beyond these questions of accuracy and authenticity, we can use these similarities to inquire about Eusebius' motivations more generally in recording martyrdoms.

IV. Eusebius, *The Martyrs of Lyons* and *The Martyrs of Palestine* re-evaluated

Since we have established that Eusebius likely did edit one set of stories using elements of the other, the next logical question to ask is why he did so. We do not need to know the direction of dependence to begin suggesting answers. Less significant than whether Eusebius portrayed martyrs contemporary with

³⁷ This is in line with Winrich Löhr's conclusion that, 'aufgrund der unsicheren Datierung der Quelle sowie der fiktiven Elemente in ihrer Darstellung der Verfolgung ist das ursprüngliche Schreiben nur mit Vorbehalt als Quelle zu einer Geschichte der Christenverfolgungen im römischen Reich brauchbar. Keinesfalls darf man es als einen naiven, "hautnahen", dicht am Geschehen klebenden Bericht der Verfolgung lesen.' W. Löhr, 'Der Brief der Gemeinden von Lyon und Vienne' (1989), 144.

³⁸ See e.g. William Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (1965), 1-30 and 505-9; T. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981), 148-63.

himself as similar to those from a far off place and time, or vice versa, is the fact that Eusebius himself envisaged the two in terms of each other. This is not insignificant, and tells us much about how we should be reading Eusebian martyrdom stories. This continuity is characteristically Eusebian. Walter Bauer made precisely this point regarding the issue of orthodoxy in the Christian church. He argued that Eusebius' 'ecclesiastical colouring'³⁹ – his desire for the early church always to have looked like the monolithic institution of his own day – had erased from the historical record the variety of early Christianities. Bauer's insight is relevant to our own study. The similar terms in which Eusebius' narratives describes martyrs of the second and fourth centuries is, I suggest, dictated by this concern for continuity.⁴⁰

In the introduction to his *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius states in the same breath that he will treat both historical martyrdoms and contemporary ones: '... the noble men who as occasion offered endured death and torture in the conflict on its behalf [the divine word's], the martyrdoms, after these things, that took place in our day also ... these it is my purpose to commit to writing ...' (καὶ πηλικοί κατὰ καιροὺς τὸν δι' αἵματος καὶ βασάνων ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ διεξῆλθον ἀγῶνα, τάτ' ἐπὶ τούτοις καὶ καθ' ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς μαρτύρια ... γραφῇ παραδοῦναι προηρημένος..., *EH* I 1.2). This article has demonstrated how the two can be concretely linked for Eusebius. There is room for much further work here on what exactly Eusebius draws out from the history of martyrdom and persecution. I suggest that in the timeless "type" of the martyr he finds opportunity to consistently paint portraits of those behavioural values he sees as characteristic of the Christian church in the past, and which he believes will be most useful to its future.⁴¹ I mentioned briefly above that one recurring similarity between the Lyons and Palestine narratives is the contrast between the violent, angry behaviour of the Roman officials and the mutual encouragement, prayer and support of the Christian victims. It is this community support, I suggest, which Eusebius wishes to present as characteristic of the Christian congregation throughout its history, and for which the martyrs prove such apposite exemplars, regardless of dating or geography.

³⁹ Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (London, 1934 [repr. 1964]), 4.

⁴⁰ This is hinted at by Barnes too; see *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981), 142 and 162.

⁴¹ See Robert Grant on the martyrs in Lyons: 'What the account of the martyrs will reveal is the nature of Christian life as supremely expressed by the martyrs themselves', in R. Grant, 'Eusebius and the Martyrs of Gaul' (1978), 133.

STUDIA PATRISTICA
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Volume 1
STUDIA PATRISTICA LIII
FORMER DIRECTORS

Gillian CLARK, Bristol, UK 60 Years (1951-2011) of the International Conference on Patristic Studies at Oxford: Key Figures – An Introductory Note.....	3
Elizabeth LIVINGSTONE, Oxford, UK F.L. Cross.....	5
Frances YOUNG, Birmingham, UK Maurice Frank Wiles.....	9
Catherine ROWETT, University of East Anglia, UK Christopher Stead (1913-2008): His Work on Patristics.....	17
Archbishop Rowan WILLIAMS, London, UK Henry Chadwick.....	31
Mark EDWARDS, Christ Church, Oxford, UK, and Markus VINZENT, King's College, London, UK J.N.D. Kelly	43
Éric REBILLARD, Ithaca, NY, USA William Hugh Clifford Frend (1916-2005): The Legacy of <i>The Donatist Church</i>	55
William E. KLINGSHIRN, Washington, D.C., USA Theology and History in the Thought of Robert Austin Markus	73

Volume 2
STUDIA PATRISTICA LIV

BIBLICAL QUOTATIONS IN PATRISTIC TEXTS
(ed. Laurence Mellerin and Hugh A.G. Houghton)

Laurence MELLERIN, Lyon, France, and Hugh A.G. HOUGHTON, Birmingham, UK Introduction	3
---	---

Laurence MELLERIN, Lyon, France	
Methodological Issues in Biblindex, An Online Index of Biblical Quotations in Early Christian Literature	11
Guillaume BADY, Lyon, France	
Quelle était la Bible des Pères, ou quel texte de la Septante choisir pour Biblindex?	33
Guillaume BADY, Lyon, France	
3 Esdras chez les Pères de l'Église: L'ambiguïté des données et les conditions d'intégration d'un 'apocryphe' dans Biblindex.....	39
Jérémy DELMULLE, Paris, France	
Augustin dans «Biblindex». Un premier test: le traitement du <i>De Magistro</i>	55
Hugh A.G. HOUGHTON, Birmingham, UK	
Patristic Evidence in the New Edition of the <i>Vetus Latina Iohannes</i>	69
Amy M. DONALDSON, Portland, Oregon, USA	
Explicit References to New Testament Textual Variants by the Church Fathers: Their Value and Limitations.....	87
Ulrich Bernhard SCHMID, Schöppingen, Germany	
Marcion and the Textual History of <i>Romans</i> : Editorial Activity and Early Editions of the New Testament	99
Jeffrey KLOHA, St Louis, USA	
The New Testament Text of Nicetas of Remesiana, with Reference to <i>Luke</i> 1:46.....	115

Volume 3

STUDIA PATRISTICA LV

EARLY MONASTICISM AND CLASSICAL *PAIDEIA*

(ed. Samuel Rubenson)

Samuel RUBENSON, Lund, Sweden	
Introduction	3
Samuel RUBENSON, Lund, Sweden	
The Formation and Re-formations of the Sayings of the Desert Fathers	5

Britt DAHLMAN, Lund, Sweden The <i>Collectio Scorialensis Parva</i> : An Alphabetical Collection of Old Apophthegmatic and Hagiographic Material.....	23
Bo HOLMBERG, Lund, Sweden The Syriac Collection of <i>Apophthegmata Patrum</i> in MS Sin. syr. 46	35
Lillian I. LARSEN, Redlands, USA On Learning a New Alphabet: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers and the Monostichs of Menander.....	59
Henrik RYDELL JOHNSÉN, Lund, Sweden Renunciation, Reorientation and Guidance: Patterns in Early Monas- ticism and Ancient Philosophy	79
David WESTBERG, Uppsala, Sweden Rhetorical Exegesis in Procopius of Gaza's <i>Commentary on Genesis</i>	95
<i>Apophthegmata Patrum</i> Abbreviations	109

Volume 4

STUDIA PATRISTICA LVI

REDISCOVERING ORIGEN

Lorenzo PERRONE, Bologna, Italy Origen's 'Confessions': Recovering the Traces of a Self-Portrait	3
Róbert SOMOS, University of Pécs, Hungary Is the Handmaid Stoic or Middle Platonic? Some Comments on Origen's Use of Logic	29
Paul R. KOLBET, Wellesley, USA Rethinking the Rationales for Origen's Use of Allegory	41
Brian BARRETT, South Bend, USA Origen's Spiritual Exegesis as a Defense of the Literal Sense.....	51
Tina DOLIDZE, Tbilisi, Georgia Equivocality of Biblical Language in Origen.....	65
Miyako DEMURA, Tohoku Gakuin University, Sendai, Japan Origen and the Exegetical Tradition of the Sarah-Hagar Motif in Alexandria	73

Elizabeth Ann Dively Lauro, Los Angeles, USA	
The Eschatological Significance of Scripture According to Origen...	83
Lorenzo Perrone, Bologna, Italy	
Rediscovering Origen Today: First Impressions of the New Collection of Homilies on the <i>Psalms</i> in the <i>Codex monacensis Graecus</i> 314....	103
Ronald E. Heine, Eugene, OR, USA	
Origen and his Opponents on <i>Matthew</i> 19:12	123
Allan E. Johnson, Minnesota, USA	
Interior Landscape: Origen's Homily 21 on <i>Luke</i>	129
Stephen Bagby, Durham, UK	
The 'Two Ways' Tradition in Origen's <i>Commentary on Romans</i>	135
Francesco Pieri, Bologna, Italy	
Origen on <i>1Corinthians</i> : Homilies or Commentary?	143
Thomas D. McGlothlin, Durham, USA	
Resurrection, Spiritual Interpretation, and Moral Reformation: A Functional Approach to Resurrection in Origen	157
Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, Milan, Italy, and Durham, UK	
'Preexistence of Souls'? The ἀρχή and τέλος of Rational Creatures in Origen and Some Origenians	167
Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, Milan, Italy, and Durham, UK	
The <i>Dialogue of Adamantius</i> : A Document of Origen's Thought? (Part Two)	227

Volume 5

STUDIA PATRISTICA LVII

EVAGRIUS PONTICUS ON CONTEMPLATION

(ed. Monica Tobon)

Monica Tobon, Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury, UK	
Introduction	3
Kevin Corrigan, Emory University, USA	
Suffocation or Germination: Infinity, Formation and Calibration of the Mind in Evagrius' Notion of Contemplation	9

Monica TOBON, Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury, UK Reply to Kevin Corrigan, 'Suffocation or Germination: Infinity, Formation and Calibration of the Mind in Evagrius' Notion of Contemplation'	27
Fr. Luke DYSINGER, OSB, Saint John's Seminary, Camarillo, USA An Exegetical Way of Seeing: Contemplation and Spiritual Guidance in Evagrius Ponticus	31
Monica TOBON, Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury, UK Raising Body and Soul to the Order of the <i>Nous</i> : Anthropology and Contemplation in Evagrius	51
Robin Darling YOUNG, University of Notre Dame, USA The Path to Contemplation in Evagrius' Letters	75

Volume 6

STUDIA PATRISTICA LVIII

NEOPLATONISM AND PATRISTICS

Victor YUDIN, UCL, OVC, Brussels, Belgium Patristic Neoplatonism	3
Cyril HOVORUN, Kiev, Ukraine Influence of Neoplatonism on Formation of Theological Language ...	13
Luc BRISSON, CNRS, Villejuif, France Clement and Cyril of Alexandria: Confronting Platonism with Chris- tianity	19
Alexey R. FOKIN, Moscow, Russia The Doctrine of the 'Intelligible Triad' in Neoplatonism and Patristics	45
Jean-Michel COUNET, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium Speech Act in the Demiurge's Address to the Young Gods in <i>Timaeus</i> 41 A-B. Interpretations of Greek Philosophers and Patristic Receptions	73
István PERCZEL, Hungary The Pseudo-Didymian <i>De trinitate</i> and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areo- pagite: A Preliminary Study	83

Andrew LOUTH, Durham, UK	
Symbolism and the Angels in Dionysios the Areopagite.....	109
Demetrios BATHRELLOS, Athens, Greece	
Neo-platonism and Maximus the Confessor on the Knowledge of God	117
Victor YUDIN, UCL, OVC, Brussels, Belgium	
A Stoic Conversion: Porphyry by Plato. Augustine's Reading of the <i>Timaeus</i> 41 a7-b6.....	127
Levan GIGINEISHVILI, Ilia State University, Georgia	
Eros in Theology of Ioane Petritsi and Shota Rustaveli.....	181

Volume 7

STUDIA PATRISTICA LIX

EARLY CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHIES

(ed. Allen Brent and Markus Vinzent)

Allen BRENT, London, UK	
Transforming Pagan Cultures	3
James A. FRANCIS, Lexington, Kentucky, USA	
Seeing God(s): Images and the Divine in Pagan and Christian Thought in the Second to Fourth Centuries AD.....	5
Emanuele CASTELLI, Università di Bari Aldo Moro, Italy	
The Symbols of Anchor and Fish in the Most Ancient Parts of the Catacomb of Priscilla: Evidence and Questions	11
Catherine C. TAYLOR, Washington, D.C., USA	
Painted Veneration: The Priscilla Catacomb Annunciation and the <i>Protoevangelion of James</i> as Precedents for Late Antique Annuncia- tion Iconography	21
Peter WIDDICOMBE, Hamilton, Canada	
Noah and Foxes: <i>Song of Songs</i> 2:15 and the Patristic Legacy in Text and Art.....	39
Catherine Brown TKACZ, Spokane, Washington, USA	
<i>En colligo duo ligna</i> : The Widow of Zarephath and the Cross.....	53

György HEIDL, University of Pécs, Hungary Early Christian Imagery of the ' <i>virga virtutis</i> ' and Ambrose's Theology of Sacraments	69
Lee M. JEFFERSON, Danville, Kentucky, USA Perspectives on the Nude Youth in Fourth-Century Sarcophagi Representations of the Raising of Lazarus	77
Katharina HEYDEN, Göttingen, Germany The Bethesda Sarcophagi: Testimonies to Holy Land Piety in the Western Theodosian Empire	89
Anne KARAHAN, Stockholm, Sweden, and Istanbul, Turkey The Image of God in Byzantine Cappadocia and the Issue of Supreme Transcendence	97
George ZOGRAFIDIS, Thessaloniki, Greece Is a Patristic Aesthetics Possible? The Eastern Paradigm Re-examined	113

Volume 8

STUDIA PATRISTICA LX

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON LATE ANTIQUE *SPECTACULA*

(ed. Karin Schlapbach)

Karin SCHLAPBACH, Ottawa, Canada Introduction. New Perspectives on Late Antique <i>spectacula</i> : Between Reality and Imagination.....	3
Karin SCHLAPBACH, Ottawa, Canada Literary Technique and the Critique of <i>spectacula</i> in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola	7
Alexander PUK, Heidelberg, Germany A Success Story: Why did the Late Ancient Theatre Continue?	21
Juan Antonio JIMÉNEZ SÁNCHEZ, Barcelona, Spain The Monk Hypatius and the Olympic Games of Chalcedon	39
Andrew W. WHITE, Stratford University, Woodbridge, Virginia, USA Mime and the Secular Sphere: Notes on Choricus' <i>Apologia Mimerum</i>	47

David POTTER, The University of Michigan, USA	
Anatomies of Violence: Entertainment and Politics in the Eastern Roman Empire from Theodosius I to Heraclius.....	61
Annewies VAN DEN HOEK, Harvard, USA	
Execution as Entertainment: The Roman Context of Martyrdom.....	73

Volume 9

STUDIA PATRISTICA LXI

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND DIVINE INSPIRATION IN AUGUSTINE

(ed. Jonathan Yates)

Anthony DUPONT, Leuven, Belgium	
Augustine's Preaching on Grace at Pentecost	3
Geert M.A. VAN REYN, Leuven, Belgium	
Divine Inspiration in Virgil's <i>Aeneid</i> and Augustine's Christian Alternative in <i>Confessiones</i>	15
Anne-Isabelle BOUTON-TOUBOULIC, Bordeaux, France	
Consonance and Dissonance: The Unifying Action of the Holy Ghost in Saint Augustine	31
Matthew Alan GAUMER, Leuven, Belgium, and Kaiserslautern, Germany	
Against the Holy Spirit: Augustine of Hippo's Polemical Use of the Holy Spirit against the Donatists	53
Diana STANCIU, KU Leuven, Belgium	
Augustine's (Neo)Platonic Soul and Anti-Pelagian Spirit	63

Volume 10

STUDIA PATRISTICA LXII

THE GENRES OF LATE ANTIQUE LITERATURE

Yuri SHICHALIN, Moscow, Russia	
The Traditional View of Late Platonism as a Self-contained System	3
Bernard POUDERON, Tours, France	
Y a-t-il lieu de parler de genre littéraire à propos des Apologies du second siècle?	11

John DILLON, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland	
Protreptic Epistolography, Hellenic and Christian	29

Svetlana MESYATS, Moscow, Russia	
Does the First have a Hypostasis? Some Remarks to the History of the Term <i>hypostasis</i> in Platonic and Christian Tradition of the 4 th – 5 th Centuries AD	41

Anna USACHEVA, Moscow, Russia	
The Term πανήγυρις in the Holy Bible and Christian Literature of the Fourth Century and the Development of Christian Panegyric Genre	57

Olga ALIEVA, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia	
Protreptic Motifs in St Basil's Homily <i>On the Words 'Give Heed to Thyself'</i>	69

FOUCAULT AND THE PRACTICE OF PATRISTICS

David NEWHEISER, Chicago, USA	
Foucault and the Practice of Patristics.....	81

Devin SINGH, New Haven, USA	
Disciplining Eusebius: Discursive Power and Representation of the Court Theologian.....	89

Rick ELGENDY, Chicago, USA	
Practices of the Self and (Spiritually) Disciplined Resistance: What Michel Foucault Could Have Said about Gregory of Nyssa	103

Marika ROSE, Durham, UK	
Patristics after Foucault: Genealogy, History and the Question of Justice	115

PATRISTIC STUDIES IN LATIN AMERICA

Patricia Andrea CÍNER, Argentina	
Los Estudios Patrísticos en Latinoamérica: pasado, presente y future	123

Edinei DA ROSA CÂNDIDO, Florianópolis, Brasil	
Proposta para publicações patrísticas no Brasil e América Latina: os seis anos dos Cadernos Patrísticos.....	131

Oscar VELÁSQUEZ, Santiago de Chile, Chile	
La historia de la patrística en Chile: un largo proceso de maduración	135

HISTORICA

Guy G. STROUMSA, Oxford, UK, and Jerusalem, Israel	
Athens, Jerusalem and Mecca: The Patristic Crucible of the Abrahamic Religions	153
Josef LÖSSL, Cardiff, Wales, UK	
Memory as History? Patristic Perspectives	169
Hervé INGLEBERT, Paris-Ouest Nanterre-La Défense, France	
La formation des élites chrétiennes d'Augustin à Cassiodore	185
Charlotte KÖCKERT, Heidelberg, Germany	
The Rhetoric of Conversion in Ancient Philosophy and Christianity	205
Arthur P. URBANO, Jr., Providence, USA	
'Dressing the Christian': The Philosopher's Mantle as Signifier of Pedagogical and Moral Authority	213
Vladimir IVANOVICI, Bucharest, Romania	
Competing Paradoxes: Martyrs and the Spread of Christianity Revisited	231
Helen RHEE, Santa Barbara, California, USA	
Wealth, Business Activities, and Blurring of Christian Identity	245
Jean-Baptiste PIGGIN, Hamburg, Germany	
The Great Stemma: A Late Antique Diagrammatic Chronicle of Pre-Christian Time	259
Mikhail M. KAZAKOV, Smolensk, Russia	
Types of Location of Christian Churches in the Christianizing Roman Empire	279
David Neal GREENWOOD, Edinburgh, UK	
Pollution Wars: Consecration and Desecration from Constantine to Julian	289
Christine SHEPARDSON, University of Tennessee, USA	
Apollo's Charred Remains: Making Meaning in Fourth-Century Antioch	297

Jacquelyn E. WINSTON, Azusa, USA	
The 'Making' of an Emperor: Constantinian Identity Formation in his Invective Letter to Arius	303
Isabella IMAGE, Oxford, UK	
Nicene Fraud at the Council of Rimini	313
Thomas BRAUCH, Mount Pleasant, Michigan, USA	
From Valens to Theodosius: 'Nicene' and 'Arian' Fortunes in the East August 378 to November 380	323
Silvia MARGUTTI, Perugia, Italy	
The Power of the Relics: Theodosius I and the Head of John the Baptist in Constantinople	339
Antonia ATANASSOVA, Boston, USA	
A Ladder to Heaven: Ephesus I and the Theology of Marian Mediation	353
Luise Marion FRENKEL, Cambridge, UK	
What are Sermons Doing in the Proceedings of a Council? The Case of Ephesus 431.....	363
Sandra LEUENBERGER-WENGER, Münster, Germany	
The Case of Theodoret at the Council of Chalcedon.....	371
Sergey TROSTYANSKIY, Union Theological Seminary, New York, USA	
The <i>Encyclical</i> of Basiliscus (475) and its Theological Significance; Some Interpretational Issues	383
Eric FOURNIER, West Chester, USA	
Victor of Vita and the Conference of 484: A Pastiche of 411?	395
Dana Iuliana VIEZURE, South Orange, NJ, USA	
The Fate of Emperor Zeno's <i>Henoticon</i> : Christological Authority after the Healing of the Acacian Schism (484-518).....	409
Roberta FRANCHI, Firenze, Italy	
<i>Aurum in luto quaerere</i> (Hier., <i>Ep.</i> 107,12). Donne tra eresia e ortodos- sia nei testi cristiani di IV-V secolo.....	419
Winfried BÜTTNER, Bamberg, Germany	
Der <i>Christus medicus</i> und ein <i>medicus christianus</i> : Hagiographische Anmerkungen zu einem Klerikerarzt des 5. Jh.....	431

Susan LOFTUS, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia Episcopal Consecration – the Religious Practice of Late Antique Gaul in the 6 th Century: Ideal and Reality	439
Rocco BORGOGNONI, Baggio, Italy Capitals at War: Images of Rome and Constantinople from the Age of Justinian	455
Pauline ALLEN, Brisbane, Australia, and Pretoria, South Africa Prolegomena to a Study of the Letter-Bearer in Christian Antiquity	481
Ariane BODIN, Paris Ouest Nanterre la Défense, France The Outward Appearance of Clerics in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries in Italy, Gaul and Africa: Representation and Reality	493
Christopher BONURA, Gainesville, USA The Man and the Myth: Did Heraclius Know the Legend of the Last Roman Emperor?	503
Petr BALCÁREK, Olomouc, Czech Republic The Cult of the Holy Wisdom in Byzantine Palestine	515

Volume 11

STUDIA PATRISTICA LXIII

BIBLICA

Mark W. ELLIOTT, St Andrews, UK <i>Wisdom of Solomon</i> , Canon and Authority	3
Joseph VERHEYDEN, Leuven, Belgium A Puzzling Chapter in the Reception History of the Gospels: Victor of Antioch and his So-called ‘Commentary on <i>Mark</i> ’	17
Christopher A. BEELEY, New Haven, Conn., USA ‘Let This Cup Pass from Me’ (<i>Matth.</i> 26.39): The Soul of Christ in Origen, Gregory Nazianzen, and Maximus Confessor	29
Paul M. BLOWERS, Emmanuel Christian Seminary, Johnson City, Ten- nessee, USA The Groaning and Longing of Creation: Variant Patterns of Patristic Interpretation of <i>Romans</i> 8:19-23	45

Riemer ROUKEMA, Zwolle, The Netherlands	
The Foolishness of the Message about the Cross (1Cor. 1:18-25): Embarrassment and Consent	55
Jennifer R. STRAWBRIDGE, Oxford, UK	
A Community of Interpretation: The Use of 1Corinthians 2:6-16 by Early Christians	69
Pascale FARAGO-BERMON, Paris, France	
Surviving the Disaster: The Use of <i>Psychē</i> in 1Peter 3:20	81
Everett FERGUSON, Abilene, USA	
Some Patristic Interpretations of the Angels of the Churches (<i>Apo-</i> <i>calypse</i> 1-3)	95

PHILOSOPHICA, THEOLOGICA, ETHICA

Averil CAMERON, Oxford, UK	
Can Christians Do Dialogue?	103
Sophie LUNN-ROCKLIFFE, King's College London, UK	
The Diabolical Problem of Satan's First Sin: Self-moved Pride or a Response to the Goads of Envy?	121
Loren KERNS, Portland, Oregon, USA	
Soul and Passions in Philo of Alexandria	141
Nicola SPANU, London, UK	
The Interpretation of <i>Timaeus</i> 39E7-9 in the Context of Plotinus' and Numenius' Philosophical Circles	155
Sarah STEWART-KROEKER, Princeton, USA	
Augustine's Incarnational Appropriation of Plotinus: A Journey for the Feet	165
Sébastien MORLET, Paris, France	
Encore un nouveau fragment du traité de Porphyre contre les chrétiens (Marcel d'Ancyre, fr. 88 Klostermann = fr. 22 Seibt/Vinzent)?	179
Aaron P. JOHNSON, Cleveland, Tennessee, USA	
Porphyry's <i>Letter to Anebo</i> among the Christians: Augustine and Eusebius	187

Susanna ELM, Berkeley, USA	
Laughter in Christian Polemics.....	195
Robert WIŚNIEWSKI, Warsaw, Poland	
Looking for Dreams and Talking with Martyrs: The Internal Roots of Christian Incubation	203
Simon C. MIMOUNI, Paris, France	
Les traditions patristiques sur la famille de Jésus: Retour sur un pro- blème doctrinal du IV ^e siècle	209
Christophe GUIGNARD, Bâle/Lausanne, Suisse	
Julius Africanus et le texte de la généalogie lucanienne de Jésus	221
Demetrios BATHRELLOS, Athens, Greece	
The Patristic Tradition on the Sinlessness of Jesus.....	235
Hajnalka TAMAS, Leuven, Belgium	
<i>Scio unum Deum vivum et verum, qui est trinus et unus Deus: The Relevance of Creedal Elements in the Passio Donati, Venusti et Her- mogenis</i>	243
Christoph MARKSCHIES, Berlin, Germany	
On Classifying Creeds the Classical German Way: ‘Privat-Bekennt- nisse’ (‘Private Creeds’)	259
Markus VINZENT, King’s College London, UK	
From Zephyrinus to Damasus – What did Roman Bishops believe?....	273
Adolf Martin RITTER, Heidelberg, Germany	
The ‘Three Main Creeds’ of the Lutheran Reformation and their Specific Contexts: Testimonies and Commentaries	287
Hieromonk Methody (ZINKOVSKY), Hieromonk Kirill (ZINKOVSKY), St Peters- burg Orthodox Theological Academy, Russia	
The Term ἐνυπόστατον and its Theological Meaning	313
Christian LANGE, Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany	
Miaenergetism – A New Term for the History of Dogma?	327
Marek JANKOWIAK, Oxford, UK	
The Invention of Dyotheletism.....	335
Spyros P. PANAGOPOULOS, Patras, Greece	
The Byzantine Traditions of the Virgin Mary’s Dormition and Assumption.....	343

Christopher T. BOUNDS, Marion, Indiana, USA	
The Understanding of Grace in Selected Apostolic Fathers	351
Andreas MERKT, Regensburg, Germany	
Before the Birth of Purgatory	361
Verna E.F. HARRISON, Los Angeles, USA	
Children in Paradise and Death as God's Gift: From Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus of Lyons to Gregory Nazianzen	367
Moshe B. BLIDSTEIN, Oxford, UK	
Polemics against Death Defilement in Third-Century Christian Sour- ces	373
Susan L. GRAHAM, Jersey City, USA	
Two Mount Zions: Fourth-Century Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic...	385
Sean C. HILL, Gainesville, Florida, USA	
Early Christian Ethnic Reasoning in the Light of <i>Genesis</i> 6:1-4	393

Volume 12

STUDIA PATRISTICA LXIV

ASCETICA

Kate WILKINSON, Baltimore, USA	
Gender Roles and Mental Reproduction among Virgins	3
David WOODS, Cork, Ireland	
Rome, Gregoria, and Madaba: A Warning against Sexual Temptation	9
Alexis C. TORRANCE, Princeton, USA	
The Angel and the Spirit of Repentance: Hermas and the Early Monastic Concept of <i>Metanoia</i>	15
Lois FARAG, St Paul, MN, USA	
Heroines not Penitents: Saints of Sex Slavery in the <i>Apophthegmata</i> <i>Patrum</i> in Roman Law Context	21
Nienke VOS, Amsterdam, The Netherlands	
Seeing <i>Hesychia</i> : Appeals to the Imagination in the <i>Apophthegmata</i> <i>Patrum</i>	33

Peter TÓTH, London, UK	
‘In volumine Longobardo’: New Light on the Date and Origin of the Latin Translation of St Anthony’s Seven Letters.....	47
Kathryn HAGER, Oxford, UK	
John Cassian: The Devil in the Details.....	59
Liviu BARBU, Cambridge, UK	
Spiritual Fatherhood in and outside the Desert: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective	65

LITURGICA

T.D. BARNES, Edinburgh, UK	
The First Christmas in Rome, Antioch and Constantinople	77
Gerard ROUWHORST, University of Tilburg, The Netherlands	
Eucharistic Meals East of Antioch	85
Anthony GELSTON, Durham, UK	
A Fragmentary Sixth-Century East Syrian Anaphora	105
Richard BARRETT, Bloomington, Indiana, USA	
‘Let Us Put Away All Earthly Care’: Mysticism and the <i>Cherubikon</i> of the Byzantine Rite	111

ORIENTALIA

B.N. WOLFE, Oxford, UK	
The Skeireins: A Neglected Text	127
Alberto RIGOLIO, Oxford, UK	
From ‘Sacrifice to the Gods’ to the ‘Fear of God’: Omissions, Additions and Changes in the Syriac Translations of Plutarch, Lucian and Themistius	133
Richard VAGGIONE, OHC, Toronto, Canada	
Who were Mani’s ‘Greeks’? ‘Greek Bread’ in the <i>Cologne Mani Codex</i>	145
Flavia RUANI, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, France	
Between Myth and Exegesis: Ephrem the Syrian on the Manichaean <i>Book of Giants</i>	155

Hannah HUNT, Leeds, UK ‘Clothed in the Body’: The Garment of Flesh and the Garment of Glory in Syrian Religious Anthropology.....	167
Joby PATERUPARAMPIL, Leuven, Belgium <i>Regula Fidei</i> in Ephrem’s <i>Hymni de Fide</i> LXVII and in the <i>Sermones de Fide</i> IV.....	177
Jeanne-Nicole SAINT-LAURENT, Colchester, VT, USA Humour in Syriac Hagiography	199
Erik W. KOLB, Washington, D.C., USA ‘It Is With God’s Words That Burn Like a Fire’: Monastic Discipline in Shenoute’s Monastery	207
Hugo LUNDHAUG, Oslo, Norway Origenism in Fifth-Century Upper Egypt: Shenoute of Atripe and the Nag Hammadi Codices	217
Aho SHEMUNKASHO, Salzburg, Austria Preliminaries to an Edition of the Hagiography of St Aho the Stran- ger (ܐܚܐ ܫܡܘܢܟܐܫܐ)	229
Peter BRUNS, Bamberg, Germany Von Magiern und Mönchen – Zoroastrische Polemik gegen das Christentum in der armenischen Kirchengeschichtsschreibung.....	237
Grigory KESSEL, Marburg, Germany New Manuscript Witnesses to the ‘Second Part’ of Isaac of Nineveh	245

CRITICA ET PHILOLOGICA

Michael PENN, Mount Holyoke College, USA Using Computers to Identify Ancient Scribal Hands: A Preliminary Report	261
Felix ALBRECHT, Göttingen, Germany A Hitherto Unknown Witness to the Apostolic Constitutions in Uncial Script.....	267
Nikolai LIPATOV-CHICHERIN, Nottingham, UK, and St Petersburg, Russia Preaching as the Audience Heard it: Unedited Transcripts of Patristic Homilies	277

Pierre AUGUSTIN, Paris, France	
Entre codicologie, philologie et histoire: La description de manuscrits parisiens (<i>Codices Chrysostomici Graeci</i> VII)	299
Octavian GORDON, Bucureşti, Romania	
Denominational Translation of Patristic Texts into Romanian: Elements for a Patristic Translation Theory	309

Volume 13

STUDIA PATRISTICA LXV

THE FIRST TWO CENTURIES

William C. RUTHERFORD, Houston, USA	
Citizenship among Jews and Christians: Civic Discourse in the <i>Apology</i> of Aristides	3
Paul HARTOG, Des Moines, USA	
The Relationship between <i>Paraenesis</i> and Polemic in Polycarp, <i>Philippians</i>	27
Romulus D. STEFANUT, Chicago, Illinois, USA	
Eucharistic Theology in the Martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch	39
Ferdinando BERGAMELLI, Turin, Italy	
La figura dell'Apostolo Paolo in Ignazio di Antiochia.....	49
Viviana Laura FÉLIX, Buenos Aires, Argentina	
La influencia de platonismo medio en Justino a la luz de los estudios recientes sobre el <i>Didaskalikos</i>	63
Charles A. BOBERTZ, Collegeville, USA	
'Our Opinion is in Accordance with the Eucharist': Irenaeus and the <i>Sitz im Leben</i> of Mark's Gospel.....	79
Ysabel DE ANDIA, Paris, France	
Adam-Enfant chez Irénée de Lyon	91
Scott D. MORINGIELLO, Villanova, Pennsylvania, USA	
The <i>Pneumatikos</i> as Scriptural Interpreter: Irenaeus on 1Cor. 2:15 ..	105
Adam J. POWELL, Durham, UK	
Irenaeus and God's Gifts: Reciprocity in <i>Against Heresies</i> IV 14.1...	119

Charles E. HILL, Maitland, Florida, USA ‘The Writing which Says...’ <i>The Shepherd</i> of Hermas in the Writings of Irenaeus	127
T. Scott MANOR, Paris, France Proclus: The North African Montanist?	139
István M. BUGÁR, Debrecen, Hungary Can Theological Language Be Logical? The Case of ‘Josipe’ and Melito	147
Oliver NICHOLSON, Minneapolis, USA, and Tiverton, UK What Makes a Voluntary Martyr?	159
Thomas O’LOUGHLIN, Nottingham, UK The <i>Protevangelium of James</i> : A Case of Gospel Harmonization in the Second Century?	165
Jussi JUNNI, Helsinki, Finland Celsus’ Arguments against the Truth of the Bible	175
Miroslaw MEJZNER, Warsaw (UKSW), Poland The Anthropological Foundations of the Concept of Resurrection according to Methodius of Olympus.....	185
László PERENDY, Budapest, Hungary The Threads of Tradition: The Parallelisms between <i>Ad Diognetum</i> and <i>Ad Autolycum</i>	197
Nestor KAVVADAS, Tübingen, Germany Some Late Texts Pertaining to the Accusation of Ritual Cannibalism against Second- and Third-Century Christians.....	209
Jared SECORD, Ann Arbor, USA Medicine and Sophistry in Hippolytus’ <i>Refutatio</i>	217
Eliezer GONZALEZ, Gold Coast, Australia The Afterlife in the <i>Passion of Perpetua</i> and in the Works of Tertul- lian: A Clash of Traditions	225

APOCRYPHA

Julian PETKOV, University of Heidelberg, Germany Techniques of Disguise in Apocryphal Apocalyptic Literature: Bridging the Gap between ‘Authorship’ and ‘Authority’	241
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Marek STAROWIEYSKI, Pontifical Faculty of Theology, Warsaw, Poland St. Paul dans les Apocryphes.....	253
David M. REIS, Bridgewater, USA Peripatetic Pedagogy: Travel and Transgression in the <i>Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles</i>	263
Charlotte TOUATI, Lausanne, Switzerland A 'Kerygma of Peter' behind the <i>Apocalypse of Peter</i> , the <i>Pseudo-Clementine Romance</i> and the <i>Eclogae Propheticae</i> of Clement of Alexandria	277

TERTULLIAN AND RHETORIC

(ed. Willemien Otten)

David E. WILHITE, Waco, TX, USA Rhetoric and Theology in Tertullian: What Tertullian Learned from Paul	295
Frédéric CHAPOT, Université de Strasbourg, France Rhétorique et herméneutique chez Tertullien. Remarques sur la composition de l' <i>Adu. Praxean</i>	313
Willemien OTTEN, Chicago, USA Tertullian's Rhetoric of Redemption: Flesh and Embodiment in <i>De carne Christi</i> and <i>De resurrectione mortuorum</i>	331
Geoffrey D. DUNN, Australian Catholic University, Australia Rhetoric and Tertullian: A Response	349

FROM TERTULLIAN TO TYCONIUS

J. Albert HARRILL, Bloomington, Indiana, USA Accusing Philosophy of Causing Headaches: Tertullian's Use of a Comedic Topos (<i>Praescr.</i> 16.2)	359
Richard BRUMBACK, Austin, Texas, USA Tertullian's Trinitarian Monarchy in <i>Adversus Praxean</i> : A Rhetorical Analysis	367
Marcin R. WYSOCKI, Lublin, Poland Eschatology of the Time of Persecutions in the Writings of Tertullian and Cyprian	379

David L. RIGGS, Marion, Indiana, USA The Apologetics of Grace in Tertullian and Early African Martyr Acts	395
Agnes A. NAGY, Genève, Suisse Les candélabres et les chiens au banquet scandaleux. Tertullien, Minucius Felix et les unions œdipiennes.....	407
Thomas F. HEYNE, M.D., M.St., Boston, USA Tertullian and Obstetrics.....	419
Ulrike BRUCHMÜLLER, Berlin, Germany Christliche Erotik in platonischem Gewand: Transformationstheoretische Überlegungen zur Umdeutung von Platons <i>Symposion</i> bei Methodios von Olympos.....	435
David W. PERRY, Hull, UK Cyprian's <i>Letter to Fidus</i> : A New Perspective on its Significance for the History of Infant Baptism	445
Adam PLOYD, Atlanta, USA <i>Tres Unum Sunt</i> : The Johannine Comma in Cyprian.....	451
Laetitia CICCOLINI, Paris, France Le personnage de Syméon dans la polémique anti-juive: Le cas de l' <i>Ad Vigilium episcopum de Iudaica incredulitate</i> (CPL 67°).....	459

Volume 14

STUDIA PATRISTICA LXVI

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

Jana PLÁTOVÁ, Centre for Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Texts, Olo- mouc, Czech Republic Die Fragmente des Clemens Alexandrinus in den griechischen und arabischen Katenen.....	3
Marco RIZZI, Milan, Italy The Work of Clement of Alexandria in the Light of his Contempo- rary Philosophical Teaching.....	11
Stuart Rowley THOMSON, Oxford, UK Apostolic Authority: Reading and Writing Legitimacy in Clement of Alexandria	19

Davide DAINESE, Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose ‘Giovanni XXIII’, Bologna, Italy	
Clement of Alexandria’s Refusal of Valentinian ἀπόρροια	33
Dan BATOVICI, St Andrews, UK	
Hermas in Clement of Alexandria	41
Piotr ASHWIN-SIEJKOWSKI, Chichester, UK	
Clement of Alexandria on the Creation of Eve: Exegesis in the Ser- vice of a Pedagogical Project.....	53
Pamela MULLINS REAVES, Durham, NC, USA	
Multiple Martyrdoms and Christian Identity in Clement of Alexan- dria’s <i>Stromateis</i>	61
Michael J. THATE, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT, USA	
Identity Construction as Resistance: Figuring Hegemony, Biopolitics, and Martyrdom as an Approach to Clement of Alexandria.....	69
Veronika ČERNUŠKOVÁ, Olomouc, Czech Republic	
The Concept of εὐπάθεια in Clement of Alexandria	87
Kamala PAREL-NUTTALL, Calgary, Canada	
Clement of Alexandria’s Ideal Christian Wife	99

THE FOURTH-CENTURY DEBATES

Michael B. SIMMONS, Montgomery, Alabama, USA	
Universalism in Eusebius of Caesarea: The Soteriological Use of سبحه الله وقوله آمين in Book III of the <i>Theophany</i>	125
Jon M. ROBERTSON, Portland, Oregon, USA	
‘The Beloved of God’: The Christological Backdrop for the Political Theory of Eusebius of Caesarea in <i>Laus Constantini</i>	135
Cordula BANDT, Berlin, Germany	
Some Remarks on the Tone of Eusebius’ <i>Commentary on Psalms</i> ...	143
Clayton COOMBS, Melbourne, Australia	
Literary Device or Legitimate Diversity: Assessing Eusebius’ Use of the Optative Mood in <i>Quaestiones ad Marinum</i>	151
David J. DEVORE, Berkeley, California, USA	
Eusebius’ Un-Josephan History: Two Portraits of Philo of Alexandria and the Sources of Ecclesiastical Historiography.....	161

Gregory Allen ROBBINS, Denver, USA ‘Number Determinate is Kept Concealed’ (Dante, <i>Paradiso</i> XXIX 135): Eusebius and the Transformation of the List (<i>Hist. eccl.</i> III 25)	181
James CORKE-WEBSTER, Manchester, UK A Literary Historian: Eusebius of Caesarea and the Martyrs of Lyons and Palestine	191
Samuel FERNÁNDEZ, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile ¿Crisis arriana o crisis monarquiana en el siglo IV? Las críticas de Marcelo de Ancira a Asterio de Capadocia	203
Laurence VIANÈS, Université de Grenoble / HiSoMA «Sources Chrétien- nes», France L’interprétation des prophètes par Apollinaire de Laodicée a-t-elle influencé Théodore de Mopsueste?	209
Hélène GRELIER-DENEUX, Paris, France La réception d’Apollinaire dans les controverses christologiques du V ^e siècle à partir de deux témoins, Cyrille d’Alexandrie et Théodoret de Cyr	223
Sophie H. CARTWRIGHT, Edinburgh, UK So-called Platonism, the Soul, and the Humanity of Christ in Eus- tathius of Antioch’s <i>Contra Ariomanitas et de anima</i>	237
Donna R. HAWK-REINHARD, St Louis, USA Cyril of Jerusalem’s Sacramental <i>Theōsis</i>	247
Georgij ZAKHAROV, Moscou, Russie Théologie de l’image chez Germinius de Sirmium	257
Michael Stuart WILLIAMS, Maynooth, Ireland Auxentius of Milan: From Orthodoxy to Heresy	263
Jarred A. MERCER, Oxford, UK The Life in the Word and the Light of Humanity: The Exegetical Foundation of Hilary of Poitiers’ Doctrine of Divine Infinity	273
Janet SIDAWAY, Edinburgh, UK Hilary of Poitiers and Phoebadius of Agen: Who Influenced Whom?	283
Dominique GONNET, S.J., Lyon, France The Use of the Bible within Athanasius of Alexandria’s <i>Letters to Serapion</i>	291

William G. RUSCH, New York, USA	
Corresponding with Emperor Jovian: The Strategy and Theology of Apollinaris of Laodicea and Athanasius of Alexandria.....	301
Rocco SCHEMBRA, Catania, Italia	
Il percorso editoriale del <i>De non parcendo in deum delinquentibus</i> di Lucifero di Cagliari	309
Caroline MACÉ, Leuven, Belgium, and Ilse DE VOS, Oxford, UK	
Pseudo-Athanasius, <i>Quaestio ad Antiochum</i> 136 and the <i>Theosophia</i>	319

Volume 15

STUDIA PATRISTICA LXVII

CAPPADOCIAN WRITERS

Giulio MASPERO, Rome, Italy	
The Spirit Manifested by the Son in Cappadocian Thought	3
Darren SARISKY, Cambridge, UK	
Who Can Listen to Sermons on <i>Genesis</i> ? Theological Exegesis and Theological Anthropology in Basil of Caesarea's <i>Hexaemeron</i> Homilies	13
Ian C. JONES, New York, USA	
Humans and Animals: St Basil of Caesarea's Ascetic Evocation of Paradise.....	25
Benoît GAIN, Grenoble, France	
Voyageur en Exil: Un aspect central de la condition humaine selon Basile de Césarée	33
Anne Gordon KEIDEL, Boston, USA	
Nautical Imagery in the Writings of Basil of Caesarea	41
Martin MAYERHOFER, Rom, Italien	
Die basilianische Anthropologie als Verständnisschlüssel zu <i>Ad adolescentes</i>	47
Anna M. SILVAS, Armidale NSW, Australia	
Basil and Gregory of Nyssa on the Ascetic Life: Introductory Comparisons.....	53

Antony MEREDITH, S.J., London, UK	
Universal Salvation and Human Response in Gregory of Nyssa.....	63
Robin ORTON, London, UK	
‘Physical’ Soteriology in Gregory of Nyssa: A Response to Reinhard M. Hübner.....	69
Marcello LA MATINA, Macerata, Italy	
Seeing God through Language. Quotation and Deixis in Gregory of Nyssa’s <i>Against Eunomius</i> , Book III	77
Hui XIA, Leuven, Belgium	
The Light Imagery in Gregory of Nyssa’s <i>Contra Eunomium</i> III 6..	91
Francisco BASTITTA HARRIET, Buenos Aires, Argentina	
Does God ‘Follow’ Human Decision? An Interpretation of a Passage from Gregory of Nyssa’s <i>De vita Moysis</i> (II 86)	101
Miguel BRUGAROLAS, Pamplona, Spain	
Anointing and Kingdom: Some Aspects of Gregory of Nyssa’s Pneumatology	113
Matthew R. LOOTENS, New York City, USA	
A Preface to Gregory of Nyssa’s <i>Contra Eunomium</i> ? Gregory’s <i>Epistula</i> 29	121
Nathan D. HOWARD, Martin, Tennessee, USA	
Gregory of Nyssa’s <i>Vita Macrinae</i> in the Fourth-Century Trinitarian Debate	131
Ann CONWAY-JONES, Manchester, UK	
Gregory of Nyssa’s Tabernacle Imagery: Mysticism, Theology and Politics	143
Elena ENE D-VASILESCU, Oxford, UK	
How Would Gregory of Nyssa Understand Evolutionism?	151
Daniel G. OPPERWALL, Hamilton, Canada	
Sinai and Corporate Epistemology in the Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus	169
Finn DAMGAARD, Copenhagen, Denmark	
The Figure of Moses in Gregory of Nazianzus’ Autobiographical Remarks in his Orations and Poems.....	179

Gregory K. HILLIS, Louisville, Kentucky, USA	
Pneumatology and Soteriology according to Gregory of Nazianzus and Cyril of Alexandria	187
Zurab JASHI, Leipzig, Germany	
Human Freedom and Divine Providence according to Gregory of Nazianzus	199
Matthew BRIEL, Bronx, New York, USA	
Gregory the Theologian, <i>Logos</i> and Literature	207

THE SECOND HALF OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

John VOELKER, Viking, Minnesota, USA	
Marius Victorinus' Remembrance of the Nicene Council	217
Kellen PLAXCO, Milwaukee, USA	
Didymus the Blind and the Metaphysics of Participation	227
Rubén PERETÓ RIVAS, Mendoza, Argentina	
La acedia y Evagrio Pónico. Entre ángeles y demonios	239
Young Richard KIM, Grand Rapids, USA	
The Pastoral Care of Epiphanius of Cyprus	247
Peter Anthony MENA, Madison, NJ, USA	
Insatiable Appetites: Epiphanius of Salamis and the Making of the Heretical Villain	257
Constantine BOZINIS, Thessaloniki, Greece	
<i>De imperio et potestate</i> . A Dialogue with John Chrysostom	265
Johan LEEMANS, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Leuven, Belgium	
John Chrysostom's First Homily on Pentecost (CPG 4343): Liturgy and Theology	285
Natalia SMELOVA, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, Russia	
St John Chrysostom's Exegesis on the Prophet <i>Isaiah</i> : The Oriental Translations and their Manuscripts	295
Goran SEKULOVSKI, Paris, France	
Jean Chrysostome sur la communion de Judas	311

Jeff W. CHILDERS, Abilene, Texas, USA Chrysostom in Syriac Dress.....	323
Cara J. ASPESI, Notre Dame, USA Literacy and Book Ownership in the Congregations of John Chrysostom.....	333
Jonathan STANFILL, New York, USA John Chrysostom's Gothic Parish and the Politics of Space.....	345
Peter MOORE, Sydney, Australia Chrysostom's Concept of γνώμη: How 'Chosen Life's Orientation' Undergirds Chrysostom's Strategy in Preaching.....	351
Chris L. DE WET, Pretoria, South Africa John Chrysostom's Advice to Slaveholders	359
Paola Francesca MORETTI, Milano, Italy Not only <i>ianua diaboli</i> . Jerome, the Bible and the Construction of a Female Gender Model.....	367
Vít HUŠEK, Olomouc, Czech Republic 'Perfection Appropriate to the Fragile Human Condition': Jerome and Pelagius on the Perfection of Christian Life	385
Pak-Wah LAI, Singapore The <i>Imago Dei</i> and Salvation among the Antiochenes: A Comparison of John Chrysostom with Theodore of Mopsuestia.....	393
George KALANTZIS, Wheaton, Illinois, USA <i>Creatio ex Terrae</i> : Immortality and the Fall in Theodore, Chrysostom, and Theodoret	403

Volume 16

STUDIA PATRISTICA LXVIII

FROM THE FIFTH CENTURY ONWARDS (GREEK WRITERS)

Anna LANKINA, Gainesville, Florida, USA Reclaiming the Memory of the Christian Past: Philostorgius' Missionary Heroes.....	3
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Vasilije VRANIC, Marquette University, USA The Logos as <i>theios sporos</i> : The Christology of the <i>Expositio rectae fidei</i> of Theodoret of Cyrillus	11
Andreas WESTERGREN, Lund, Sweden A Relic <i>In Spe</i> : Theodoret's Depiction of a Philosopher Saint.....	25
George A. BEVAN, Kingston, Canada Interpolations in the Syriac Translation of Nestorius' <i>Liber Heraclidis</i>	31
Ken PARRY, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia 'Rejoice for Me, O Desert': Fresh Light on the Remains of Nestorius in Egypt	41
Josef RIST, Bochum, Germany Kirchenpolitik und/oder Bestechung: Die Geschenke des Kyrill von Alexandrien an den kaiserlichen Hof	51
Hans VAN LOON, Culemborg, The Netherlands The Pelagian Debate and Cyril of Alexandria's Theology	61
Hannah MILNER, Cambridge, UK Cyril of Alexandria's Treatment of Sources in his <i>Commentary on the Twelve Prophets</i>	85
Matthew R. CRAWFORD, Durham, UK Assessing the Authenticity of the Greek Fragments on <i>Psalms</i> 22 (LXX) attributed to Cyril of Alexandria.....	95
Dimitrios ZAGANAS, Paris, France Against Origen and/or Origenists? Cyril of Alexandria's Rejection of John the Baptist's Angelic Nature in his <i>Commentary on John</i> 1:6	101
Richard W. BISHOP, Leuven, Belgium Cyril of Alexandria's Sermon on the Ascension (CPG 5281).....	107
Daniel KEATING, Detroit, MI, USA Supersessionism in Cyril of Alexandria	119
Thomas ARENTZEN, Lund, Sweden 'Your virginity shines' – The Attraction of the Virgin in the <i>Annunciation Hymn</i> by Romanos the Melodist	125
Thomas CATTOI, Berkeley, USA An Evagrian ὑπόστασις? Leontios of Byzantium and the 'Composite Subjectivity' of the Person of Christ.....	133

Leszek MISIARCZYK, Warsaw, Poland	
The Relationship between <i>nous</i> , <i>pneuma</i> and <i>logistikon</i> in Evagrius Ponticus' Anthropology	149
J. Gregory GIVEN, Cambridge, USA	
Anchoring the Areopagite: An Intertextual Approach to Pseudo-Dionysius	155
Ladislav CHVÁTAL, Olomouc, Czech Republic	
The Concept of 'Grace' in Dionysius the Areopagite	173
Graciela L. RITACCO, San Miguel, Argentina	
El Bien, el Sol y el Rayo de Luz según Dionisio del Areópago	181
Zachary M. GUILIANO, Cambridge, UK	
The Cross in (Pseudo-)Dionysius: Pinnacle and Pit of Revelation	201
David NEWHEISER, Chicago, USA	
Eschatology and the Areopagite: Interpreting the Dionysian Hierarchies in Terms of Time	215
Ashley PURPURA, New York City, USA	
'Pseudo' Dionysius the Areopagite's <i>Ecclesiastical Hierarchy</i> : Keeping the Divine Order and Participating in Divinity	223
Filip IVANOVIC, Trondheim, Norway	
Dionysius the Areopagite on Justice	231
Brenda LLEWELLYN IHSEN, Tacoma, USA	
Money in the Meadow: Conversion and Coin in John Moschos' <i>Pratum spirituale</i>	237
Bogdan G. BUCUR, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, USA	
Exegesis and Intertextuality in Anastasius the Sinaite's Homily <i>On the Transfiguration</i>	249
Christopher JOHNSON, Tuscaloosa, USA	
Between Madness and Holiness: Symeon of Emesa and the 'Pedagogics of Liminality'	261
Archbishop Rowan WILLIAMS, London, UK	
Nature, Passion and Desire: Maximus' Ontology of Excess	267
Manuel MIRA IBORRA, Rome, Italy	
Friendship in Maximus the Confessor	273

Marius PORTARU, Rome, Italy	
Gradual Participation according to St Maximus the Confessor.....	281
Michael BAKKER, Amsterdam, The Netherlands	
Willing in St Maximos' Mystagogical Habitat: Bringing Habits in Line with One's <i>logos</i>	295
Andreas ANDREOPOULOS, Winchester, UK	
'All in All' in the Byzantine Anaphora and the Eschatological Mys- tagogy of Maximos the Confessor.....	303
Cyril K. CRAWFORD, OSB, Leuven, Belgium (†)	
'Receptive Potency' (<i>dektikē dynamis</i>) in <i>Ambigua ad Iohannem</i> 20 of St Maximus the Confessor.....	313
Johannes BÖRJESSON, Cambridge, UK	
Maximus the Confessor's Knowledge of Augustine: An Exploration of Evidence Derived from the <i>Acta</i> of the Lateran Council of 649 ..	325
Joseph STEINEGER, Chicago, USA	
John of Damascus on the Simplicity of God.....	337
Scott ABLES, Oxford, UK	
Did John of Damascus Modify His Sources in the <i>Expositio fidei</i> ? ...	355
Adrian AGACHI, Winchester, UK	
A Critical Analysis of the Theological Conflict between St Symeon the New Theologian and Stephen of Nicomedia.....	363
Vladimir A. BARANOV, Novosibirsk, Russia	
<i>Amphilochia</i> 231 of Patriarch Photius as a Possible Source on the Christology of the Byzantine Iconoclasts	371
Theodoros ALEXOPOULOS, Athens, Greece	
The Byzantine <i>Filioque</i> -Supporters in the 13 th Century John Bekkos and Konstantin Melitiniotes and their Relation with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.....	381
Nicholas BAMFORD, St Albans, UK	
Using Gregory Palamas' Energetic Theology to Address John Ziziou- las' Existentialism	397
John BEKOS, Nicosia, Cyprus	
Nicholas Cabasilas' Political Theology in an Epoch of Economic Crisis: A Reading of a 14 th -Century Political Discourse	405

Volume 17

STUDIA PATRISTICA LXIX

LATIN WRITERS

Dennis Paul QUINN, Pomona, California, USA	
In the Names of God and His Christ: Evil Daemons, Exorcism, and Conversion in Firmicus Maternus.....	3
Stanley P. ROSENBERG, Oxford, UK	
Nature and the Natural World in Ambrose's <i>Hexaemeron</i>	15
Brian DUNKLE, S.J., South Bend, USA	
Mystagogy and Creed in Ambrose's <i>Iam Surgit Hora Tertia</i>	25
Finbarr G. CLANCY, S.J., Dublin, Ireland	
The Eucharist in St Ambrose's Commentaries on the <i>Psalms</i>	35
Jan DEN BOEFT, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, The Netherlands	
<i>Qui cantat, vacuus est</i> : Ambrose on singing	45
Crystal LUBINSKY, University of Edinburgh, UK	
Re-reading Masculinity in Christian Greco-Roman Culture through Ambrose and the Female Transvestite Monk, Matrona of Perge.....	51
Maria E. DOERFLER, Durham, USA	
Keeping it in the Family: The law and the Law in Ambrose of Milan's Letters	67
Camille GERZAGUET, Lyon, France	
Le <i>De fuga saeculi</i> d'Ambroise de Milan et sa datation. Notes de philologie et d'histoire.....	75
Vincenzo MESSANA, Palermo, Italia	
Fra Sicilia e Burdigala nel IV secolo: gli intellettuali Citaro e Vittorio (Ausonius, <i>Prof.</i> 13 e 22)	85
Edmon L. GALLAGHER, Florence, Alabama, USA	
Jerome's <i>Prologus Galeatus</i> and the OT Canon of North Africa.....	99
Christine McCANN, Northfield, VT, USA	
Incentives to Virtue: Jerome's Use of Biblical Models	107
Christa GRAY, Oxford, UK	
The Monk and the Ridiculous: Comedy in Jerome's <i>Vita Malchi</i>	115

Zachary YUZZA, Cornell University, USA To Live by the Example of Angels: Dialogue, Imitation and Identity in Sulpicius Severus' <i>Gallus</i>	123
Robert McEACHNIE, Gainesville, USA Envisioning the Utopian Community in the Sermons of Chromatius of Aquileia	131
Hernán M. GIUDICE, Buenos Aires, Argentina El Papel del Apóstol Pablo en la Propuesta Priscilianista	139
Bernard GREEN, Oxford, UK Leo the Great on Baptism: <i>Letter</i> 16.....	149
Fabian SIEBER, Leuven, Belgium Christologische Namen und Titel in der <i>Paraphrase des Johannes- Evangeliums</i> des Nonnos von Panopolis	159
Junghoo KWON, Toronto, Canada The Latin Pseudo-Athanasian <i>De trinitate</i> Attributed to Eusebius of Vercelli and its Place of Composition: Spain or Northern Italy?	169
Salvatore COSTANZA, Agrigento, Italia Cartagine in Salviano di Marsiglia: alcune puntualizzazioni.....	175
Giulia MARCONI, Perugia, Italy <i>Commendatio</i> in Ostrogothic Italy: Studies on the Letters of Enno- dius of Pavia	187
Lucy GRIG, Edinburgh, UK Approaching Popular Culture in Late Antiquity: Singing in the Ser- mons of Caesarius of Arles.....	197
Thomas S. FERGUSON, Riverdale, New York, USA Grace and Kingship in <i>De aetatibus mundi et hominis</i> of Planciades Fulgentius	205
Jérémy DELMULLE, Paris, France Establishing an Authentic List of Prosper's Works.....	213
Albertus G.A. HORSTING, Notre Dame, USA Reading Augustine with Pleasure: The Original Form of Prosper of Aquitaine's <i>Book of Epigrams</i>	233

Michele CUTINO, Palermo, Italy Prosper and the Pagans	257
Norman W. JAMES, St Albans, UK Prosper of Aquitaine Revisited: Gallic Friend of Leo I or Resident Papal Adviser?.....	267
Alexander Y. HWANG, Louisville, USA Prosper of Aquitaine and the Fall of Rome.....	277
Brian J. MATZ, Helena, USA Legacy of Prosper of Aquitaine in the Ninth-Century Predestination Debate	283
Raúl VILLEGAS MARÍN, Paris, France, and Barcelona, Spain Original Sin in the Provençal Ascetic Theology: John Cassian.....	289
Pere MAYMÓ I CAPDEVILA, Barcelona, Spain A Bishop Faces War: Gregory the Great's Attitude towards Ariulf's Campaign on Rome (591-592).....	297
Hector SCERRI, Msida, Malta Life as a Journey in the Letters of Gregory the Great.....	305
Theresia HAINTHALER, Frankfurt am Main, Germany Canon 13 of the Second Council of Seville (619) under Isidore of Seville. A Latin Anti-Monophysite Treatise	311

NACHLEBEN

Gerald CRESTA, Buenos Aires, Argentine From Dionysius' <i>thearchia</i> to Bonaventure's <i>hierarchia</i> : Assimilation and Evolution of the Concept.....	325
Lesley-Anne DYER, Notre Dame, USA The Twelfth-Century Influence of Hilary of Poitiers on Richard of St Victor's <i>De trinitate</i>	333
John T. SLOTEMAKER, Boston, USA Reading Augustine in the Fourteenth Century: Gregory of Rimini and Pierre d'Ailly on the <i>Imago Trinitatis</i>	345

Jeffrey C. WITT, Boston, USA	
Interpreting Augustine: On the Nature of 'Theological Knowledge' in the Fourteenth Century.....	359
Joost VAN ROSSUM, Paris, France	
Creation-Theology in Gregory Palamas and Theophanes of Nicaea, Compatible or Incompatible?	373
Yilun CAI, Leuven, Belgium	
The Appeal to Augustine in Domingo Bañez' Theology of Efficacious Grace	379
Elizabeth A. CLARK, Durham, USA	
Romanizing Protestantism in Nineteenth-Century America: John Williamson Nevins, the Fathers, and the 'Mercersburg Theology'	385
Pier Franco BEATRICE, University of Padua, Italy	
Reading Elizabeth A. Clark, <i>Founding the Fathers</i>	395
Kenneth NOAKES, Wimborne, Dorset, UK	
'Fellow Citizens with you and your Great Benefactors': Newman and the Fathers in the Parochial Sermons	401
Manuela E. GHEORGHE, Olomouc, Czech Republic	
The Reception of Hesychia in Romanian Literature.....	407
Jason RADCLIFF, Edinburgh, UK	
Thomas F. Torrance's Conception of the <i>Consensus patrum</i> on the Doctrine of Pneumatology	417
Andrew LENOX-CONYNGHAM, Birmingham, UK	
In Praise of St Jerome and Against the Anglican Cult of 'Niceness'	435

Volume 18

STUDIA PATRISTICA LXX

ST AUGUSTINE AND HIS OPPONENTS

Kazuhiko DEMURA, Okayama, Japan	
The Concept of Heart in Augustine of Hippo: Its Emergence and Development	3

Therese FUHRER, Berlin, Germany The 'Milan narrative' in Augustine's <i>Confessions</i> : Intellectual and Material Spaces in Late Antique Milan	17
Kenneth M. WILSON, Oxford, UK Sin as Contagious in the Writings of Cyprian and Augustine.....	37
Marius A. VAN WILLIGEN, Tilburg, The Netherlands Ambrose's <i>De paradiso</i> : An Inspiring Source for Augustine of Hippo	47
Ariane MAGNY, Kamloops, Canada How Important were Porphyry's Anti-Christian Ideas to Augustine?	55
Jonathan D. TEUBNER, Cambridge, UK Augustine's <i>De magistro</i> : Scriptural Arguments and the Genre of Philosophy	63
Marie-Anne VANNIER, Université de Lorraine-MSH Lorraine, France La mystagogie chez S. Augustin.....	73
Joseph T. LIENHARD, S.J., Bronx, New York, USA <i>Locutio</i> and <i>sensus</i> in Augustine's Writings on the Heptateuch.....	79
Laela ZWOLLO, Centre for Patristic Research, University of Tilburg, The Netherlands St Augustine on the Soul's Divine Experience: <i>Visio intellectualis</i> and <i>Imago dei</i> from Book XII of <i>De genesi ad litteram libri XII</i>	85
Enrique A. EGUIARTE, Madrid, Spain The Exegetical Function of Old Testament Names in Augustine's <i>Commentary on the Psalms</i>	93
Mickaël RIBREAU, Paris, France À la frontière de plusieurs controverses doctrinales: <i>L'Enarratio au</i> <i>Psaume</i> 118 d'Augustin	99
Wendy ELGERSMA HELLEMAN, Plateau State, Nigeria Augustine and Philo of Alexandria's 'Sarah' as a Wisdom Figure (<i>De</i> <i>Civitate Dei</i> XV 2f.; XVI 25-32)	105
Paul VAN GEEST, Tilburg and Amsterdam, The Netherlands St Augustine on God's Incomprehensibility, Incarnation and the Authority of St John.....	117

Piotr M. PACIOREK, Miami, USA	
The Metaphor of ‘the Letter from God’ as Applied to Holy Scripture by Saint Augustine	133
John Peter KENNEY, Colchester, Vermont, USA	
Apophasis and Interiority in Augustine’s Early Writings	147
Karl F. MORRISON, Princeton, NJ, USA	
Augustine’s Project of Self-Knowing and the Paradoxes of Art: An Experiment in Biblical Hermeneutics	159
Tarmo TOOM, Washington, D.C., USA	
Was Augustine an Intentionalist? Authorial Intention in Augustine’s Hermeneutics	185
Francine CARDMAN, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA	
Discerning the Heart: Intention as Ethical Norm in Augustine’s <i>Homilies on 1 John</i>	195
Samuel KIMBRIEL, Cambridge, UK	
Illumination and the Practice of Inquiry in Augustine	203
Susan Blackburn GRIFFITH, Oxford, UK	
Unwrapping the Word: Metaphor in the Augustinian Imagination...	213
Paula J. ROSE, Amsterdam, The Netherlands	
‘ <i>Videbit me nocte proxima, sed in somnis</i> ’: Augustine’s Rhetorical Use of Dream Narratives.....	221
Jared ORTIZ, Washington, D.C., USA	
The Deep Grammar of Augustine’s Conversion	233
Emmanuel BERMON, University of Bordeaux, France	
Grammar and Metaphysics: About the Forms <i>essendi</i> , <i>essendo</i> , <i>essendum</i> , and <i>essens</i> in Augustine’s <i>Ars grammatica breuiata</i> (IV, 31 Weber)	241
Gerald P. BOERSMA, Durham, UK	
Enjoying the Trinity in <i>De uera religione</i>	251
Emily CAIN, New York, NY, USA	
Knowledge Seeking Wisdom: A Pedagogical Pattern for Augustine’s <i>De trinitate</i>	257

Michael L. CARREKER, Macon, Georgia, USA The Integrity of Christ's <i>Scientia</i> and <i>Sapientia</i> in the Argument of the <i>De trinitate</i> of Augustine	265
Dongsun CHO, Fort Worth, Texas, USA An Apology for Augustine's <i>Filioque</i> as a Hermeneutical Referent to the Immanent Trinity	275
Ronnie J. ROMBS, Dallas, USA The Grace of Creation and Perfection as Key to Augustine's <i>Confes-</i> <i>sions</i>	285
Matthias SMALBRUGGE, Amsterdam, The Netherlands Image as a Hermeneutic Model in <i>Confessions</i> X	295
Naoki KAMIMURA, Tokyo, Japan The Consultation of Sacred Books and the Mediator: The <i>Sortes</i> in Augustine	305
Eva-Maria KUHN, Munich, Germany Listening to the Bishop: A Note on the Construction of Judicial Authority in <i>Confessions</i> VI 3-5	317
Jangho JO, Waco, USA Augustine's Three-Day Lecture in Carthage	331
Alicia EELEN, Leuven, Belgium 1Tim. 1:15: <i>Humanus sermo</i> or <i>Fidelis sermo</i> ? Augustine's <i>Sermo</i> 174 and its Christology	339
Han-luen KANTZER KOMLINE, South Bend, IN, USA ' <i>Ut in illo uiueremus</i> ': Augustine on the Two Wills of Christ	347
George C. BERTHOLD, Manchester, New Hampshire, USA Dyothelite Language in Augustine's Christology	357
Chris THOMAS, Central University College, Accra, Ghana Donatism and the Contextualisation of Christianity: A Cautionary Tale	365
Jane E. MERDINGER, Incline Village, Nevada, USA Before Augustine's Encounter with Emeritus: Early Mauretanian Donatism	371

James K. LEE, Southern Methodist University, TX, USA The Church as Mystery in the Theology of St Augustine	381
Charles D. ROBERTSON, Houston, USA Augustinian Ecclesiology and Predestination: An Intractable Problem?	401
Brian GRONEWOLLER, Atlanta, USA Felicianus, Maximianism, and Augustine's Anti-Donatist Polemic...	409
Marianne DJUTH, Canisius College, Buffalo, New York, USA Augustine on the Saints and the Community of the Living and the Dead.....	419
Bart VAN EGMOND, Kampen, The Netherlands Perseverance until the End in Augustine's Anti-Donatist Polemic	433
Carles BUENACASA PÉREZ, Barcelona, Spain The Letters <i>Ad Donatistas</i> of Augustine and their Relevance in the Anti-Donatist Controversy	439
Ron HAFLIDSON, Edinburgh, UK Imitation and the Mediation of Christ in Augustine's <i>City of God</i> ...	449
Julia HUDSON, Oxford, UK Leaves, Mice and Barbarians: The Providential Meaning of Incidents in the <i>De ordine</i> and <i>De ciuitate Dei</i>	457
Shari BOODTS, Leuven, Belgium A Critical Assessment of Wolfenbüttel Herz.-Aug.-Bibl. <i>Cod. Guelf. 237 (Helmst. 204)</i> and its Value for the Edition of St Augustine's <i>Sermones ad populum</i>	465
Lenka KARFÍKOVÁ, Prague, Czech Republic Augustine to Nebridius on the Ideas of Individuals (<i>ep. 14,4</i>).....	477
Pierre DESCOTES, Paris, France Deux lettres sur l'origine de l'âme: Les <i>Epistulae</i> 166 et 190 de saint Augustin.....	487
Nicholas J. BAKER-BRIAN, Cardiff, Wales, UK Women in Augustine's Anti-Manichaean Writings: Rumour, Rhetoric, and Ritual.....	499

Michael W. TKACZ, Spokane, Washington, USA Occasionalism and Augustine's Builder Analogy for Creation.....	521
Kelly E. ARENSEN, Pittsburgh, USA Augustine's Defense and Redemption of the Body	529
Catherine LEFORT, Paris, France À propos d'une source inédite des <i>Soliloques</i> d'Augustin: La notion cicéronienne de «vraisemblance» (<i>uerisimile</i> / <i>similitudo ueri</i>).....	539
Kenneth B. STEINHAUSER, St Louis, Missouri, USA Curiosity in Augustine's <i>Soliloquies</i> : <i>Agitur enim de sanitate oculo- rum tuorum</i>	547
Frederick H. RUSSELL, Newark, New Jersey USA Augustine's Contradictory Just War.....	553
Kimberly F. BAKER, Latrobe, Pennsylvania, USA <i>Transfiguravit in se</i> : The Sacramentality of Augustine's Doctrine of the <i>Totus Christus</i>	559
Mark G. VAILLANCOURT, New York, USA The Eucharistic Realism of St Augustine: Did Paschasius Radbertus Get Him Right? An Examination of Recent Scholarship on the Ser- mons of St Augustine	569
Martin BELLEROSE, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombie Le sens pétrinien du mot <i>παροιικός</i> comme source de l'idée augus- tinienne de <i>peregrinus</i>	577
Gertrude GILLETTE, Ave Maria, USA Anger and Community in the <i>Rule</i> of Augustine.....	591
Robert HORKA, Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology, Comenius University Bratislava, Slovakia <i>Curiositas ductrix</i> : Die negative und positive Beziehung des hl. Augustinus zur Neugierde.....	601
Paige E. HOCHSCHILD, Mount St Mary's University, USA Unity of Memory in <i>De musica</i> VI	611
Ali BONNER, Cambridge, UK The Manuscript Transmission of Pelagius' <i>Ad Demetriadem</i> : The Evidence of Some Manuscript Witnesses	619

Peter J. VAN EGMOND, Amsterdam, The Netherlands	
Pelagius and the Origenist Controversy in Palestine.....	631
Rafał TOCZKO, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland	
Rome as the Basis of Argument in the So-called Pelagian Controversy (415-418).....	649
Nozomu YAMADA, Nanzan University, Nagoya, Japan	
The Influence of Chromatius and Rufinus of Aquileia on Pelagius – as seen in his Key Ascetic Concepts: <i>exemplum Christi</i> , <i>sapientia</i> and <i>imperturbabilitas</i>	661
Matthew J. PEREIRA, New York, USA	
From Augustine to the Scythian Monks: Social Memory and the Doctrine of Predestination	671